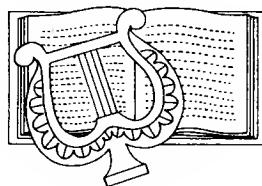


LOVE'S TREASON

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD



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LOVE'S TREASON;

OR,

THE TWO PRIVATEERS

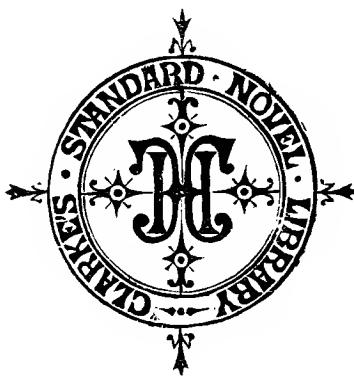
(*The Vendetta and the Avenger*).

BY

W STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF

"THE BLACK ANGEL," "STAR OF THE SOUTH," "FIERY CROSS,"
"REBEL PRIVATEER," ETC., ETC.



LONDON:
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LOVE'S TREASON;

OR,

THE TWO PRIVATEERS.

LOVE'S TREASON ;

OR,

THE VENDETTA AND THE AVENGER.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE SLAVER—BLACK BOSCO—A MAN-OF-WAR IN SIGHT.

THE perpendicular rays of the summer tropic sun played down in all their fierce fire on the island of Cuba—brightest jewel in the Spanish crown—and the surrounding seas.

It is about noon at the end of June, 1863—a time when the terrible conflict between the Northern and Southern States of America is still being waged with relentless fury.

At the present moment, however, we have not to deal with that eventful struggle, though in the course of our story it must be introduced. I wish to direct the attention of the reader to the rocky and reef-bound coast on the northern side of the island of Cuba—that part between Cape St. Antonio, the westernmost point of the island, and the splendid port and town of Havannah.

The navigation near the shore is here exceedingly dangerous, by reason of the shoals and rocks called Los Caberrallos, which extend, with little interruption, from Cape Antonio to Bahia Hinda, some distance west of Havannah.

These rocks and keys, as they are called, do not constitute a continuous line of reef, but are spriukled about at short intervals from one another, and at distances from the shore ranging from a half to three-quarters of a mile or more.

Some were altogether sunken, and could only be avoided by their presence being known to the captain of the vessel

sailing in close proximity to this dangerous coast, or by a vigilant look-out from the mast-head.

Under any circumstances, even with the brightest look-out and the most skilful and well-informed pilot, the navigation, near shore, amidst those reefs and rocks, visible and sunken, could not but be most dangerous.

One would naturally fancy that no captain would trust his vessel within a mile of them, who could possibly help it.

And with a light, pleasant, fair wind, a vessel rigged as a three-masted topsail schooner may be seen making her way eastward along the coast.

Not only is she close to the dangerous reefs and rocks, but at times actually passes between, and darts inside, placing herself between them and the land.

Again she is steered out through some narrow channel, with the sea breaking in foam on the rocks a few fathoms on either side, and again after awhile she dives in amongst the dangers which most commanders would shudderingly avoid, but which her captain seems to court and rejoice in.

Let us take a nearer look at this vessel, and imagine ourselves on her deck.

Sharp in the bow, she gradually widens till her greatest beam is reached, not as is usual, nearly amidships, but much farther aft, giving her much the appearance of a wedge, viewed from aloft.

Though with great breadth of beam from the deck to a little below the water line, from this she sloped rapidly into the keel.

This sharp build below water, and great breadth above, gave plenty of room on the upper deck and 'twcen decks, but little or no hold beneath for cargo.

She was rigged as a topsail schooner, having an enormous fore-and-aft mainsail and foresail and balloon jib, with mizen and gaff topsail aft.

Her topsails were very large for a vessel of her size, apparently about two hundred tons, and she could set, moreover, a large square foresail, lower and topmast staysails.

With all these sails spread, she would present a perfect

clown of canvas to the wind, and from her sharp build and clear run should prove a very fast clipper.

On the afterpart of her deck, near the cabin skylight, are two small brass cannon, loaded to the muzzle and ready for firing.

They are pointed, not through portholes, but towards the forward part of her own deck.

From this fact, and from their small size, it would appear they could not be meant for offence against other vessels, or even to resist an attack from without, but rather to be used in case of mutiny on board.

Abaft the main hatch there lay on deck, covered with tarpaulin, a long, cylindrical object. And before the main hatch, also covered with tarpaulin, was another object also cylindrical in shape, but not so long as the other.

The first of these is a smoke funnel, and a slight volume of smoke curling up from the stump, not lowered like the upper part, told that her fires were alight, and that steam could very soon be got up.

The vessel was a steamer, although viewing her from a little distance not even a sailor could guess such to be the fact.

At least, if not exactly a steamer in that sense of depending altogether or principally on steam, she had engines, and an auxiliary screw.

The other shorter object covered with tarpaulin is a long rifled swivel gun, the only armament she carries at all formidable.

About the forepart of the deck the crew are congregated, as great a set of desperadoes and as stalwart ruffians as one would wish to see.

About half of them are mulattoes—Malays and Madagascar men principally, for there are reasons against the employment of African blacks on board this vessel.

The rest appear to be Spaniards, Mexicans, or Brazilians, by their costume and the gold earrings they all wear.

The crew, all told, number twenty-eight men, a very good complement for a small vessel. Besides those, there are eight stokers, engineers, and firemen, and seven more, including boatswain, carpenter, blacksmiths, cook, steward. &c.

This, with the captain and two mates, makes up a complement of forty-six, all told.

And now we will come right aft to the binnacle, where stands the mate, Pedro, and the captain, Bosco Negro (Black Bosco), by his side, directing his course, and conversing in a low tone of voice.

"This trip, Pedro, we've cleared the value of the ship and the cargo we took out ten times over. I would not take less than a thousand bright Spanish doubloons for my share." (A gold doubloon is worth about three pounds ten shillings sterling.)

"*Carago!*" replied the mate, "we have indeed been lucky."

"Such small loss too. Only eighteen out of three hundred and sixty ; it is magnificent. My share should be close on to five hundred doubloons."

"Aye, that it should, and well earned, too. The way you tricked that rascally old King Kettle out of his canal load of thirty, and then shot him through the head to put an end to further disputes, was magnificent."

At this moment there arose a loud and terrific yell from the fore hatchway—a piercing wail of agony, as though the souls of some of the damned were howling in their misery for mercy.

"What's all that about?"

"Oh, I expect it's a blackbird dead ; they always set up that yell when one of them dies—curse them!"

"D—n!" muttered the Black Bosco ; "five and twenty doubloons gone."

Scarcely had he spoken when another and more unearthly yell went up to Heaven from the main hatchway.

"Why, there is not a chap dead down the main hold too, I hope?"

"No, no, I guess not," said the mate, who had care of the cargo ; "it's a way those blackies have got : when one lot sets up a howlin' the others do the same just to keep 'em company."

"Here, I'll take the helm, Pedro. You just go forward and fire a charge of dust-shot down the fore and main hatchways ; that'll quiet 'em, I reckon."

The mate went forward to execute this cruel order—not an unusual one with Black Bosco.

The two men, although both half-bred Spaniards, spoke English, having been much in the Southern States of America.

There was another advantage in speaking English to one another.

No one else on board could understand the language, so they had no need to be afraid of being overheard, and occasionally matters were discussed between them which, had some of the desperadoes of the crew known of, would have put the slave captain in great danger of an unexpected stab from one of the long, cruel-looking knives every man carried.

Of course the reader has ere now discovered that this is a slaver, just returned from the coast of Africa, after having made a successful run so far.

And now she is almost in sight of her destination.

A little creek, not marked down on any chart, about twenty miles to the westward of Havannah, is where she is to run in and land her live cargo.

This creek or inlet forms the mouth of a small river or stream, which flows through the estate of a wealthy nobleman and slave proprietor, one Don Jose de Malatesta.

He it is who owns this slaver ; it is his money which has equipped and sent forth this expedition to the African coast, as he has many before.

A man of great wealth, yet greedy for more, Don Jose is active, cruel, unscrupulous, and remorseless, caring not how he attains his end.

The mate Pedro went forward, and carried out to the letter the brutal orders of his captain, shouting out, however, before he fired down the hatchway, in their native tongue—

“ Mind your eyes there, you fellows : I’m going to shoot among you.”

At least, he has some little humanity, a looker-on might remark, on hearing this warning addressed to the wretched victims.

Nothing of the kind.

For all the worthy Pedro cared, every living man down in that close, foetid hold might have had his eyes put out with hot irons, if it would not spoil him as saleable property.

But as it happened, a blind nigger would be almost worthless, and twenty or thirty such would materially decrease his share in the profits of the run.

Hence his care for the niggers' eyes.

A loud chorus of yells and screams followed the discharge of small-shot down the crowded hold, for though only a small charge of powder was used, purposely, yet there was sufficient to drive the little leaden bullets into the skin, and cause exquisite pain.

Having discharged a barrel down each hold, the mate shouted in a stentorian voice to the unfortunates below, that unless they instantly ceased howling he would repeat the dose. This had its effect, and in a short time comparative silence reigned in the densely crowded and pestilent 'tween decks.

Having sent a couple of Malays down to bring up the dead nigger and throw him overboard, the mate went off again to the captain. The wind had now fallen very light, so that at times the sails flapped against the mast. The heat of the sun was intense, and though there was not a cloud to be seen in the sky, a sort of haze rose both from the land and sea, and objects could not be made out at more than a mile or two distant.

"Wind's a falling light, Pedro, but I think I see signs of a breeze springing up from the nor-nor-west, which will suit us well. I shall go and lie down for an hour; keep her a clear quarter of a mile from the rocks, and call me at once if the breeze freshens, or anything happens; keep a good look-out for sails, especially ahead. We ain't going to be riddled within twenty miles or so of port if we can help it."

"All right, Captain Bosco," said the mate, taking the wheel, "I'll look out."

Black Bosco then went below into the cabin, which, for a vessel of this kind, was luxuriously furnished.

At the foremost end was a large full-length mirror, and in

this the captain of the slaver proceeded to survey himself with evident satisfaction.

His appearance was striking enough.

Of medium height, very broad shouldered, and slightly bow legged, he looked a man possessed of great strength.

His complexion was very swarthy, as dark, indeed, as that of many negroes.

His features were not altogether bad, but the mouth was coarse, the nose broad and thick, though not flat, like that of a negro.

He wore a short black curling beard and whiskers, and his hair, of the same ebony colour, hung in long ringlets on his shoulders.

In his ears he wore gold wires, to which were suspended small gold coins. A gold chain was round his neck ; he had gold rings on his fingers, and a pair of pistols in the silk scarf round his waist, with ivory handles, and richly ornamented with gold filagree work.

As for dress, it was picturesque enough for a pirate chief.

White canvas or duck trousers, with a red silk scarf round the waist, set off greatly by the ornamented pistols ; a fine white shirt with highly embroidered front, fastened at the collar by a heavy gold link ; a gaudy silk handkerchief was around his neck. Over his shirt he wore a loose quilted jacket of striped yellow and white silk, which presented a remarkable contrast to his swarthy complexion and olive beard and hair ; a broad-brimmed Panama hat and canvas shoes completed the attire of the slave captain.

After admiring himself in the mirror for some moments, he threw himself on a couch, and was soon fast asleep.

He had slept about an hour, when he was aroused by the mate.

"A large ship standing down on us from the north, under steam and sail. I have only just made her out through the haze. She is bringing a breeze with her. A Yankee man-of-war, I'm afraid."

"D—n !" roared Black Bosco, and rushed on deck.

CHAPTER II.

CHASED BY A FRIGATE—ROCKS AND REEFS—A DESPERATE EXPEDIENT.

BLACK Bosco had not been on deck many moments when all was activity and bustle ; the wonderful energy of the man was shown forth.

He shouted down the stokehole to the firemen to pile up the furnaces ; and himself, with two more, cleared away and hoisted the funnel.

Then he shouted out wildly for more sail to be made—darting hither and thither, cursing, cuffing, and imparting to the men some of his own energy.

Next he seized a spy-glass, and ran up to the mast-head and took a long look at the strange ship, now fast approaching.

What he saw was by no means re-assuring.

The breeze had caught the vessel now, and drifted away all the haze, so that there was a clear view of the sea right to the horizon.

About twelve miles off on his port-beam he saw a large square-rigged vessel coming right down on him.

A column of smoke from her funnel showed that she was under steam as well as sail, and her appearance and size proclaimed her a man-of-war—a large frigate.

Sailing as she was, right before the wind, and heading direct for the slaver, in an hour, at the outside, she would be within easy range, unless he could, by altering his course, escape her.

But the slaver was beating nearly due east, parallel to the land and lines of rocks and reefs, distant only a little more than a quarter of a knot.

The land itself was scarcely more than a mile distant, so close had he kept in.

Under the circumstances, it would seem that the slaver was caught in a trap.

He could not put her helm up and try her speed at a stern chase, for there was the land close on her lee.

It was useless also to turn back, for the frigate would, by

altering her course slightly, so as to steer across her bows, get within range in less than an hour.

To keep on ahead seemed open to the same objection ; yet nevertheless it was ahead Black Bosco looked, scanning minutely and carefully the distant landmarks, and looking eagerly among the rocks and reefs for openings and channels.

After five minutes thus spent he came down.

All possible sail had been made on the vessel, and the steam was fast accumulating in the boilers.

Meanwhile, the strange vessel, steering a course direct for the slaver, bore down at the rate of at least eight miles an hour.

Minutes slipped on, and the slaver, gliding through the water like a witch, might have distanced her pursuer with ease, could she have made more of a stern chase of it by keeping away.

But the dangerous rocks on her lee, quite close, sometimes so near that a biscuit might have been tossed into the breakers, prevented that ; and it was even necessary to haul her wind a little so as to get a better offing.

All this while Black Bosco was in the foretop, anxiously scrutinizing the rocks and reefs ahead, which, at a little distance, seemed to form a complete line of barrier, but on getting up to which, resolved themselves into isolated rocks and patches, the sea breaking furiously over all.

On sped the two vessels—pursuer and pursued—the frigate momentarily drawing nearer to the slaver.

“By the sandals of San Antonio !” cried Black Bosco, shutting up the glass with a bang, “I see the Crab Passage.”

“The Crab Passage !” exclaimed the mate. “You would never attempt to take her through that, under sail, and chased ?”

“By all the saints, I do, though ; I can do it, and she shall do it, or leave her ribs on the rocks.”

“Bang !”

A puff of white smoke from the bow of the frigate told whence the report had come. At the same moment the Yankee flag—the stars and stripes—was run up to the breeze.

"Show our ensign—the Spanish flag," said Black Bosco; "in a quarter of an hour more we ought to be nearly safe."

The Spanish flag was hoisted in reply, but beyond this no notice was taken of the gun, which, from a man-of-war, always means "heave-to."

After an interval of a couple of minutes, another puff of white smoke belched forth from the bows of the frigate. This time it was followed by the roar of a round-shot as well as the report, which was much sharper and harder. The cannon ball pitched into the water right astern of the slaver, and so close as actually to throw the spray over the taffrail.

"Run forward and get the light sails in, Pedro," said Black Bosco, "I'll take the helm a bit. Bear a hand."

The instant the light sails were taken in and secured, Black Bosco placed the mate at the wheel, and, seizing the speaking-trumpet, prepared to carry out his desperate attempt.

"All hands wear ship, stand by the jib, the mainsail, and foresail. Hard down with the helm."

Answering to her helm, the head of the slaver came sweeping round to the north, and in half a minute her prow was pointed right in the rocks, and the wind right aft.

"Starboard! starboard! Pedro," cried the captain, his eyes firmly fixed on a large rock with a conical peak, against the base of which the sea beat furiously, sending the spray yards off.

"Steady! So."

The slaver was under full steam, and each moment now took her farther from her pursuer.

As for the frigate, she backed her mainsail yard, and lay as though her commander was mystified by this sudden and strange manœuvre on the part of the slaver.

Every moment, every fathom gained, was of vital importance to the slaver, and under full steam she dashed amidst the dangerous rocks and reefs.

"Ain't I steering too close to that big rock, captain?" asked Pedro.

"That big rock's our safety. There's deep water within

ten feet of it," replied Black Bosco, emphatically. "Steady ! So. That will do."

Bosco held his breath, half fearing to hear and feel the fatal bump which should tell that the ship had struck, and all was over with the niggers and his hoped-for doubloons.

But she escaped with a graze only, and slid along into smooth water, to meet another and larger rock right ahead.

This was avoided by bringing her right up in the wind on the port tack, when once more she was kept away, and stood direct for the shore.

"Santissima Trinidada!" he cried, with blasphemous glee, as the swift clipper shot into the clear water between the rocks and the land, "we have escaped—the saints and angels have befriended us."

Pedro grinned at the idea of Black Bosco, himself, and the crew of the slaver, having been befriended by saints and angels.

"I was thinking whether it might not have been the foul fiend who had done us a good turn," he remarked, with grim humour ; "then no longer will we insult him by calling him the foul fiend. Steward, bring up a bottle of Malaga, and glasses."

They were brought, and Black Bosco, filling his own glass and that of his mate, shouted, with a defiant laugh—

"Here's health and success to the Prince of the Infernal Regions—our good friend ; henceforth will we call him not the foul, but the fair fiend !"

And at that remark the slaver glided into smooth water, leaving all rocks and reefs behind her.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTURE OF THE SLAVER—ESCAPE OF BLACK BOSCO.

THE frigate, after delivering the last broadside, tacked and stood off from the rocks as too dangerous neighbours.

The captain of the slaver seeing this, threw up his hat and shouted triumphantly—

"Bravo ! All hail to our patron saint, San Diavolo. Now, Pedro, let us drink to St. Diavolo."

With these words Black Bosco filled up his own and Pedro's glass.

Just as he raised it above his head it was dashed from his hand by a round-shot.

Bang ! Bang !

Bang ! Crash !

Three loud reports, and the smashing of timber.

Black Bosco was reclining lazily on a hen-coop, looking out seawards at the Yankee frigate, when this fresh alarm came. Instantly he leaped to his feet, ran over to the starboard side, leaped on the rail, and holding on to the mizen-rigging, looked out in the direction where the cannonade came.

He saw three large man-of-war boats, each with a gun mounted at the bow.

From a flag-staff at the stern of each there floated a flag—the British ensign.

"Steward, my glass," roared Black Bosco, still standing on the rail, and holding on to the rigging. "Quick, d—n you!"

In a moment or two the telescope was brought.

The captain snatched it from the hand of his steward, placed it to his eye, and had a look.

He could read the name on the hatbands of the sailors of the English boats.

"Ten thousand devils !" he roared ; "it's the boats of the *Phenix*, that chased us on the Gold Coast. She's come in first, and laid wait for us. We have been betrayed."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when—

Bang ! bang !! bang !! !

The three guns in the bows of the man-of-war boats were again fired, this time at closer quarters, and with more effect. Every shot told.

Two out of three struck the vessel between wind and water on the starboard bow, and then she rapidly began to fill.

"Port your helm," shouted Black Bosco. "Hard-a-port. Go ahead with the engines. Full speed !"

Putting the helm hard-a port caused the vessel's head to point straight for the shore.

Doubtless the slave captain, as a last resort, wished to run

her on the beach in the hope of landing and securing some of the slaves.

But it was too late. With a ringing cheer the three boats came on, and in less than two minutes were close under the bows of the slaver.

"First cutters, follow me," shouted a young officer, as, sword and revolver in hand, he clambered on board the slaver. A dozen brawny seamen were close behind, and in ten minutes, after hardly any resistance, Black Bosco's ship was in the hands of the English. But the slave captain himself had disappeared.

He and the mate Pedro lowered the dingy, which hung from davits at the taffrail, and as the vessel was boarded over the bows, contrived to paddle off to the shore unnoticed.

In a quarter of an hour the slaver had settled so far down in the water, that it was obvious she must sink, so all haste was made to release the unlucky slaves from their fetters.

She settled down in shallow water, her upper deck and bulwarks remaining above the surface. The crew were all put in irons, and arrangements made for transferring the slaves to the English man-of-war, whence they would be drafted into transports and sent back to the coast of Africa — altogether a pretty expensive proceeding for John Bull.

CHAPTER IV

LA SENORITA GIULIA DE CORDOVA D'ALMAVIRAS.

IT was one of the many saint days which all devout Spaniards think themselves bound to keep holy by abstaining from all work, drinking a great quantity of *vino tinto*, making a great noise, and otherwise amusing themselves. On this evening the theatres were all crammed, the singing-rooms crowded to overflowing, while the various *nostinas* and *albergurias* with which the streets are plentifully lined, drove a roaring trade.

In addition to the ordinary floating population, there were ashore, on the evening of this feast of San Joseph, a number of liberty-men from the English and American men-of-war.

The boats of the English vessel, the *Phœnix*, had the very day before captured a notorious slaver, commanded by a well-known man in the trade—*il capitano Bosco Negro*, as he was familiarly called.

So the English sailors had not only liberty, but a prospect of good prize-money, for the Government paid liberally for the capture of slavers caught in *flagrante derelicto*.

Many of the officers of the men-of-war also went ashore, and amongst them the third lieutenant, with whom we shall have a great deal to do—Edward Blake.

A handsome, strapping young fellow was Lieutenant Blake, with curling black hair, keen dark eyes, and a skin much too dark for a Saxon.

This was accounted for by the fact of young Blake's mother having been a Spaniard, an exceedingly beautiful opera singer, with whom his father chose to fall violently in love, and marry.

He thus offended all his friends and relations, and it was not till years after his death that Edward Blake's grandfather—a proud old baronet, Sir Sigismund Blake—would have anything to say to or do with the orphan boy.

He took care, however, that the lad should have a good education, and when he was fourteen, so far relented as to procure him a berth as midshipman in the Royal Navy.

This was from the only friend or relation Edward Blake had in the world.

True, he must some day succeed to the baronetcy, but the old man had the power to dispose of every acre of the property, every sixpence of money, and leave the heir nothing but the barren title.

Under those circumstances, it may well be conceived that it was an affair of the utmost importance to young Blake to keep on good terms with his captain and superior officers.

The first lieutenant, however, was his bitter and avowed enemy, and as he was, moreover, the son of the captain, Blake had considerable difficulty in keeping things even tolerably pleasant.

By studiously avoiding giving offence, however, and refusing, on his part, to take offence, he managed to keep things smooth.

On the night of the feast of San Joseph an unfortunate affair took place in which Edward Blake bore a part.

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock, and the third lieutenant having left the opera, where he had spent the evening, was thinking of returning on board the ship.

Strolling across the Grand Place, he passed the open door of a house brilliantly lighted, from which the sounds of dancing and music issued.

"Some public assembly, or ball, I suppose," he said to himself, and would have passed on but that he was attracted by a conversation at the door.

He soon recognized English uniforms, and pushed through the crowd to ascertain what was going on.

An open carriage was surrounded by a crowd of English sailors, half intoxicated, some quite so.

He was ashamed to observe that there were several officers present, who also were the worse for wine, and instead of restraining the rioters, encouraged them.

Amongst these was the first lieutenant.

Blake's first impulse was to retire, and not give him a chance to provoke a quarrel.

But his own hot temper and indignation at what he saw prevailed over prudence. Lieutenant Walters and another officer, one of the master's mates, forcibly entered the open carriage, in which were already seated two ladies, one dark, the other fair, both of whom Edward Blake saw to be very beautiful.

The first lieutenant forced himself into a seat between them, and endeavoured then to take one on his knee, placing his arm round her waist to do so.

The young lady screamed, and strove to escape from his grasp.

In so doing the light silk dress she wore was torn, and her shawl also having been dragged off, her shoulders and upper part of her body were left bare, exposed to the lewd gaze of the drunken rabble.

Blake's blood boiled at witnessing this gross outrage. Without staying to think or to calculate the consequences, he forced his way through the crowd, seized the first

lieutenant by the collar, and forcibly dragged him from the carriage.

He did the same with equal promptitude to the master's mate, and the ladies found themselves in about half a minute freed from their enemies.

The first lieutenant, however, excited by wine, was not disposed to let the affair rest so, and struck Blake, who instantly returned the blow.

"Take that, you coward!" he cried, as he landed a stinger on the right eye of Walter.

The latter now drew his sword, and Blake, in self-defence, was forced to do the same.

The combat was very brief; the first lieutenant was half drunk, and had but little command over his weapon.

In a few seconds he was disarmed, and his wrist sprained. In the *mélée* he had received a cut on the forehead, from which the blood now poured.

"You shall answer for this before a court-martial," he roared to Blake, as the latter leaped into the carriage in order further to protect the ladies if necessary.

He, too, had received a slight cut on the hand, but nothing serious.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," he said in Spanish, which he spoke well; "I will protect you from further insult. Where shall I tell your coachman to drive?"

"The Villa de Cordova," answered the dark one of the two beauties.

"I will accompany you a part of the way at least."

"Thanks, senor; you are too good."

Blake, standing up in the carriage with drawn sword, prevented any further attempt, and the coachman drove off.

Blake stopped him when well clear of the crowd, and alighted.

"Whom have I had the honour of rendering some slight service to?" he said, raising his cap.

"Ah! senor, I must take another opportunity of thanking you. Here is my card. I perceive you are an officer; you must come to my father's grand ball on the anniversary of the birthday of Queen Isabella, a week to-night. Do not forget."

As she spoke, she handed him a card, on which was engraved in silver letters—

*"La Senorita Giulia,
Castelmarina de Cordova."*

“The daughter of the Marquis de Cordova!” Edward Blake exclaimed, as he read the name, “the proudest and wealthiest nobleman in Cuba. Ah, me! quite a romantic adventure; one for which, however, I shall have to pay dearly; for that vindictive Walters will charge me with something, and will swear to any lie before the court-martial. Dismissed her Majesty’s service, I suppose, will be my fate,” he muttered, bitterly; “and so farewell to all my prospects.”

CHAPTER V

UNDER ARREST.

EDWARD BLAKE, with bitterness in his heart, went down to the quay, and hiring a shore-boat, was rowed alongside the English man-of-war, and went on board.

As it happened, he had no duty that night, and there were none of his brother officers he cared for on deck, so he went below, and turned into his berth.

He rose in the morning but little refreshed, and had barely dressed himself and taken a cup of coffee, when word was brought to him by a midshipman to attend the captain in his cabin.

On entering the state room, he saw the captain seated at the head of the table, his son, the first lieutenant, and another officer on his right hand, while three more officers were on the left.

All looked stern and solemn.

Edward Blake marched up to the captain, and after saluting, stood awaiting orders.

“Surrender your sword, Lieutenant Blake.”

The young fellow did so, not without a pallor of the cheek and a trembling of the hands, which evinced his consciousness of the disgrace, albeit unmerited as it was.

“A serious charge, or rather charges, have been brought against you of drunkenness, insolent language; of drawing

on and striking your superior officer, and behaviour generally unworthy of an officer and a gentleman."

"I am innocent, sir," said Blake, firmly.

The captain pointed to the head of his son. The first lieutenant was strapped up with surgical plaisters.

"That is proof indeed that you must be in some degree guilty. Do you deny that it was yon who wounded the first lieutenant?"

"I did it in self-defence. He drew on me first," said the young man, calmly.

"It's a lie!" said Lieutenant Walker; "you struck me first, because yon were jealous, seeing me enter a carriage with two ladies."

Edward Blake's cheek flushed, and his eyes flashed at the insolence of his accuser. Unable to control his passion, he said, vehemently—

"You lie, yourself, Lieutenant Walker. You richly deserved all, and worse than yon received. Contemptible coward that you are!"

Lieutenant Walker turned to the captain (his father), and said, with snake-like craft—

"You hear, sir, his violent language. I believe, were you not present, he would draw a sword and strike me unawares again."

The lieutenant did not think it convenient to remember that he himself had set the example of violent language by giving Blake the lie.

"A court-martial shall decide, sir," said the captain sternly. "Meanwhile, your violent language and threatening demeanour is not likely to do good to your cause. You will remain below till the sundown gun-fire, after which you can come on deck to take exercise, or go ashore if you choose. You will not, however, wear her Majesty's uniform off the ship."

Edward Blake could say nothing in reply, so with a bitter heart, he saluted and withdrew.

Of course he went below, being under arrest, swordless and disgraced.

He occupied a cabin with a young Irishman—an officer much junior to himself in the service.

Like most of his countrymen, Jack O'Brien was warm-hearted, brave, and impulsive.

He was just brushing up to go on deck and take his watch when Edward Blake entered.

"Hallo, Blake, my boy ! tear and ages, what's the matter ? You look as melancholy as Barney Finnigan on his wedding morning."

"I went on deck with my sword on," said Blake gloomily ; "I have come down without."

"Why, you omadhaun !" cried the volatile Irishman, "have you left it on deck or lost it overboard ; or lent it to the black cook to skewer a sucking pig with ?"

"Worse than any of those, Jack, much worse."

"Worse ! the devil ! What is it, then, anyhow ?"

"I was ordered to surrender my sword, and am under arrest."

At this O'Brien looked grave.

"What, for that bit of a scrimmage you were telling me of the other night with the first luff ?"

"That's just it."

"The mean, skulking hound ! I only wish I had him in Connemara. By the piper that played before Moses, some of the boys would break every bone in his cursed yellow skin !"

"Ah ! but unfortunately he's on board H.M.S. *Phœnix*, in Havannah Bay, and the captain's son, as well as first lieutenant."

"Look here, old fellow," said Jack O'Brien, giving him his hand, "I always liked you. You and I were always sort of chums ; and by the boots of my ancestor, Brian Borrhu, I'll stick to you and see you safe through this."

The unfortunate officer, though he felt deeply thankful for the warm-hearted Irishman's sympathy and promise of standing to him in his trouble, could not help smiling at the strange way he expressed it.

"I didn't know you had royal blood in your veins, Jack," he said.

"Ah ! but I have though, and the real, right down Irish royal blood that will make some of the sneaking blackguards jump again if they don't look out. See here, now, Ned, my

boy ; I'm going on duty, but I'll think over this business all the time, and concoct a scheme what we shall do—you're going to stop below till gun-fire, so just you set to work and concoct a scheme too, and this evening we'll talk 'em both over and see which is best."

So saying, Jack O'Brien went on deck, leaving our hero a little bit cheered up with the knowledge of having at least one friend, but still sad and down-hearted.

In the evening, the instant the sun-down gun was fired, he went on deck, glad to get a breath of fresh air after having been below all day.

Jack O'Brien joined him at the gangway.

"Well, my honey, have ye thought of a schame, yet ? "

"I have, Jack. But let's hear yours first, I'm certain sure you have got one."

"I have so, my honey. It's just as simple as it's iligant and agreeable."

"Elegant and agreeable, eh ? I wonder what it can be ? "

"Why, what in the world else, but just go and see the lady yourself—the lovely Spanish princess you saved from that vagabone Walker. Down on your bended knees, quite gallant like, make a beautiful spache, and sure the thing's done. She'll come aboard with her father, and no end of nobles, tell the truth, and knock the court-martial to blazes."

Now this, though expressed in a rather wild and incoherent manner, seemed to Ned Blake by no means bad advice, especially as it tallied with his own ideas on the subject.

The next night Jack O'Brien and our hero were being rowed across Havannah Bay, towards a quay near the custom-house, by a pair of stout Spanish boatmen.

Blake doubted whether he would have been allowed the use of a ship's boat, and, at all events, did not care to risk it.

They had little difficulty in finding either the town mansion or the villa, a little way out on the shores of the harbour, of so wealthy and powerful a nobleman as the Marquis d'Almaviras. But beyond that their expedition was an utter failure. They learned that he was at his villa, and hiring a conveyance, they were driven there.

A pompous porter, in gorgeous livery of black velvet trimmed with scarlet, and with a superabundance of gilt

buttons on every part of his attire, answered their inquiries. They could make no impression on him whatever ; neither bribes nor promises had the slightest effect.

CHAPTER VI.

EDWARD BLAKE WRITES A LETTER.

EDWARD BLAKE acted imprudently, perhaps, in asking, in the first place, for the Senora Giulia. Speaking Spanish fluently as he did, it would have been better, perhaps, to have requested an interview with the marquis, when he would easily have explained the affair.

The old man looked horrified and astonished beyond measure when Blake boldly asked for the young lady, and gave his name simply as Lieutenant Blake.

He disappeared, however, for a moment or two, and they were congratulating themselves it was all right, when he returned and told them gruffly the lady could not be seen, and they had better go about their business. Whereupon he slammed the great courtyard door in their faces.

"I wonder now," said O'Brien, "whether that velvet-coated old vagabond took your message to the lady at all?"

"I should think, at all events, it was taken to her," said our friend bitterly.

After a pause Blake said, "I'll write her a letter. That must reach her, surely."

"Right you are, my boy ! It's just my idea, and please the pigs, we'll just concoct a lovely epistle before we turn in."

The letter required great consideration.

However, it was indited, and approved by both at last.
It was in Spanish, but we give it in English :—

H.M.S. *Phoenix*,

"Lying in Havannah Bay.

"Most honoured Senora,—

I presume to address to you this note, trusting you are well in health and mind, as your great charms and virtues deserve. I trust you suffered no subsequent inconvenience from the affair of the other night when I had the honour of making your acquaintance. I regret to say that there will be a court-martial on board our vessel, and that I am to be tried. The date is fixed for the ——

I trust to see or hear from you before then, as you and you only, sweet senora, can calm my troubled mind and give me assurance of a happy termination. A few words from you, and from the most unhappy, your ardent admirer and devoted servant will become the most fortunate, of men.

"Farewell! angels keep you.

"For ever your humble servant,

"EDWARD BLAKE.

"La Senora Giulia de Cardova d'Almaviras."

The high-flown portion and love passages were solely due to O'Brien, who declared that the letter was a great deal too rue.

Edward Blake, on the other hand, though he had yielded in some measure to his impulsive friend, feared lest the letter should give offence by reason of its freedom, and the somewhat warm language in which it was couched.

It was not to be sent at once ; not until the date of the court-martial should be fixed, which, not being known at the present time, had been left blank.

But the next afternoon Edward Blake was informed that he would be brought before the court-martial four days from that date.

That evening he and O'Brien went ashore together, in order to send off the important missive to its destination.

They wished by no means to present it themselves, lest, incurring the animosity of the porter, he should destroy it.

So they employed a courier from one of the principal hotels, who was well recommended, and dispatched him with the precious document.

He returned shortly, and reported that he had duly delivered it, that it was taken by a fat porter in black velvet and gilt buttons, who went inside with it, and returning in a few moments, said it was all right ; thereupon he had wished him good evening, and ridden off back.

Blake paid him, and tolerably well satisfied and easy in mind, they returned on board the ship.

From that time till the court-martial Edward Blake passed most of his time at a port-hole between decks, looking towards the shore.

Day by day, hour by hour, he looked longingly for the appearance of a boat rapidly rowed towards the vessel,

and bearing on board the angel of his dreams, the lovely Giulia d'Almaviras, Queen of Andalusia.

But as day by day passed, and he neither heard nor saw anything, he began to fear for the result.

At last arrived the important morning, which was to decide the fate of Edward.

The English ship of war *Panther* had arrived in port the evening before, and on this morning the commodore, captain, and officers, enough to make a full court, came on board the *Phœnix*.

Edward Blake kept his post at the port between decks, keeping an anxious look-out for the expected witness.

But minute by minute, hour by hour, slipped by, and still no signs of the Senorita Giulia de Cordova d'Almaviras, the beauty of Andalusia.

Four bells—six bells—seven bells—half-past eleven, and the court-martial was to assemble at noon precisely.

Noon came, and no signs of any boat.

He groaned aloud in the agony of his spirit, and when an officer came to summon him to the tribunal, he looked pale, crestfallen, guilty.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COURT-MARTIAL.

ON reaching the deck, Blake found two marines with shoulder'd arms waiting to receive him at the top of the ladder, and between these he was marched a prisoner to the cabin.

Ere he entered, however, he cast one last longing, lingering look across the bay, hoping to see the expected boat bearing the Giulia to his rescue.

But alas ! it was not to be seen.

When he entered the cabin, he found the court already assembled.

He bowed, and took his place at the foot of the table, the two marines a pace or two behind him.

First the charges were read out to him by Commodore Jackson, of the *Panther*, president of the court.

To all he pleaded not guilty.

Then the trial proceeded.

Lieutenant Walker gave his evidence.

Other witnesses were called to prove he was in a state of intoxication, used blasphemous and insolent language, &c.

But these did not speak at all positively, nor as if they had their hearts in what they said.

It was pretty well known among a certain party that these men were acting under fear of the first lieutenant.

However, their evidence did not have much effect, and probably the prisoner was scarcely damaged by it.

The evidence for the prosecution being ended, the prisoner was called upon for his defence.

He had none ready prepared, but spoke freely, and without embarrassment.

His speech, delivered without embarrassment or hesitation, produced a favourable effect on the court.

He neither looked nor spoke like a guilty man.

Presently, however, the president, to whom Captain Walker, the father of the prosecutor, had been whispering, addressed him :—

“Prisoner, we have listened with attention to your defence, and will allow it all the weight it deserves. If you can substantiate your assertion it will go far to clear you of the charges against you. Have you any witnesses in support of your version of the affair ?”

“Alas ! no, sir ; I have nothing but my innocence and the justice of my cause to rely upon.”

The case was now at an end, and it remained only for the court to deliberate on their verdict.

The prisoner was marched off on deck between the two marines, where he awaited his fate.

In about a quarter of an hour he was again marched back into the cabin, and again took up his position at the foot of the table.

“Prisoner,” said the president, addressing him ; “after careful consideration, the court has decided your case. Until the sentence is made known you will be placed under no restrictions, except that you are forbidden to wear her Majesty’s uniform.

Edward Blake went down to his berth and wept.

"Ruined — disgraced — dishonored." Such were the words he muttered again and again to himself.

* * * * *

The birthday of the sovereign of Spain is a great occasion in Havannah and all Spanish possessions, especially among the nobility and the higher classes. The *fêtes* given by the brilliant, powerful, and wealthy Marquis d'Almaviras had long been celebrated for their magnificence, and this year he seemed determined to keep up their reputation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIRTHDAY FETE.

EDWARD BLAKE had made up his mind to attend the *fête* at the Villa Castelmarina, and he kept to his resolution.

Jack O'Brien counselled him to go in his lieutenant's uniform, as, until the sentence of the court-martial was approved of by the admiral and made known, he still had a right to wear it.

Jack urged that though he was forbidden to appear in uniform on board, this did not apply to him on shore.

But Blake was not convinced, and positively refused to wear his uniform, deciding to go in plain evening dress.

The evening came, and the young man, carefully dressing himself, wrapped his cloak around him and went ashore, accompanied by Jack O'Brien, almost the only friend who stuck by him in his trouble.

But to proceed.

He and Jack O'Brien were driven in a hired fly to Castelmarina.

The self-same pompous porter opened the gate, and recognizing him as having called before, and also noticing his dress, looked contemptuously at him, and seemed inclined to slam the gate in his face.

Edward Blake was attired in plain black, with only a dress shirt and tie to match.

The señorita's card gained him instant admission.

Following his guide he came to two folding doors, which, throwing open, Blake saw a large and brilliantly-lighted saloon—as yet but scantily peopled—for the guests had only just begun to arrive.

"Il Señor Edward Blaque," shouted the official, and the young man, slightly embarrassed, first passed in.

There was no one to receive him, and he knew no one, so he strolled on alone.

He was, however, tolerably though not perfectly acquainted with Spanish customs and etiquette, and knew that the host and hostess only received at assemblies for one hour. All who came earlier or later had themselves to seek out the master or mistress, and pay their respects, in the meantime strolling about and doing exactly as they pleased.

Edward Blake soon found his way into the open air, and wandered down the beautiful grassy slopes and pleasure grounds to the water of the bay, which absolutely washed the turf at the end of the long garden. Here there was a charming pleasure-house and boat-house, where the fair Giulia delighted to sit in the cool of the tropical evening.

There was a full moon, and Edward Blake, charmed with the beauty and soft repose of the scene, lighted a cigarette, and gave himself up to thought.

He could hear footsteps approaching, and voices—female voices.

"I wonder whether that young Englishman will come to-night," he heard one of them say.

"Oh, you mean the young officer who so gallantly interfered in our favour the other night? Of course he will. Did you not give him your own card?"

"There is no 'of course' about it. These English are incomprehensible, and, as a rule, I hate them."

Here, then, was the solution of the cause of his letter being neglected. He bitterly reproached himself for having blasted his prospects for such a cold-hearted, false girl as this.

CHAPTER IX.

EDWARD BLAKE'S INTERVIEW WITH THE SENORITA.

He walked about for some few minutes with the intention of letting his excitement calm down. When he thought he had got himself thoroughly under control, he strolled leisurely up to the villa, doing his best to look careless and unconcerned.

As he entered, however, he saw his own reflection in a mirror, and absolutely started. Fortunately, this was only a sort of hall or ante-chamber, and there were none of the company present ; so, calling one of the numerous servants, he asked him if he could be shown a room where he could wash and make himself presentable.

Doubtless the man thought that he had been indulging rather too freely in wine, of which there was an unlimited supply ; but he said nothing, and at once conducted him to a luxuriously-appointed chamber, where he found every possible requisite for the toilette.

In a quarter of an hour he had thoroughly renovated himself, and, but for a certain glitter in the eyes, showed no sign of his previous excitement.

Wine being continually offered to him whenever he stood still near any of the refreshment buffets or sideboards, he partook pretty freely, but not sufficiently to have any effect on his head.

Presently he saw the daughter of the house walking arm-in-arm with Ethelinda, a bosom friend of hers.

He stood on one side, half concealed by a pillar, as they passed, and had a good look at them.

He could not deny that she was ravishingly beautiful. Her dark eyes flashed like diamonds. There was a bright colour on her lovely cheek, and altogether, as she walked with a graceful, undulating motion down the room, bowing and smiling occasionally as she saw an acquaintance or friend, he thought she was the most splendid specimen of womanhood he had ever seen.

He waited till they had passed and turned to come up the room again.

Then he came forth and advanced to meet them, doing his best to look agreeable and unconcerned. He went right up to them and bowed.

Giulia stopped and looked at him in obvious surprise. She did not recognize him in plain evening dress.

Ethelinda, however, was quicker, or her memory more retentive, though she, too, for a moment did not know him.

“ Giulia,” she said, in a low voice, “ it is the gentleman who so kindly came to our aid the other night, and to whom you gave your card.”

Instantly a flash of recognition lighted up the fair Spaniard's face.

With a bright smile and blush she hastened to greet the Englishman.

Taking his hand in both hers, she cried, with beaming eyes, and in tones of what really seemed unfeigned pleasure—

“Ah, señor, I am so glad, so delighted to see you. I was afraid you would not come.”

Edward Blake could not answer a word. He was aghast at what he considered her consummate effrontery. But he misjudged her. For she knew nothing of what had happened, while he, thinking she knew and treated his misfortunes with indifference and contempt, felt bitterly incensed against her.

In a little time his spirits rose. A sort of false exhilaration took possession of him.

He talked gaily, laughed, and seemed as merry as it was possible to be.

All the time, however, Ethel Verinder, who had a very acute perception, kept watching him furtively.

There was something in his manner she could not understand, and vainly she puzzled to decide what it was.

Giulia, however, noticed nothing of this, but was in excellent temper and spirits.

“I am so glad you speak Spanish,” she said; “and so well, too, that, but for a slight accent, I should never have known you were not a countryman.”

“I have mixed much among Spaniards,” he said, guardedly. He did not choose to mention his mother, and say that she was a Spanish lady.

“And now what can I do to show my gratitude to you,” she said, looking in his face and smiling; “I mean now, ‘at present?’”

“Well,” he said, with a laugh, which seemed gay enough, “I will tell you; I wonder whether you will refuse.”

“That depends,” she said, prudently, “on what it is you ask.”

“Dance with me three consecutive dances.”

Ethelinda burst out laughing.

"Certainly, sir, you will bear out in one respect the opinion my friend has formed of Englishmen. You are sufficiently audacious ! Three consecutive dances!"

"Come, Lady Giulia, yes or no," he said, smiling in her face.

She looked grave.

"Tell me, sir, are you noble, of good birth ? for if not, I have no business to dance with you at all."

"I have no father," he said, gravely ; "but my grandfather is a baronet—Sir Sigismund Blake—I am heir to the title, and after him I shall be a baronet also—Sir Edward Blake. The banner of my ancestor—the founder of our family—was borne without dishonour on the glorious field of Agincourt."

Her countenance brightened up instantly.

"That will do," she said ; "that is quite sufficient. I have heard my father say that many English baronets are of better and older family than your modern dukes and earls. I accede to your request, I will dance with you for three dances consecutively."

Ethelinda laughed.

He turned towards her.

"May I be bold enough to make the same request of you, young lady ?"

"Well, you have got a good share of impudence, I must say," she laughed. "However, I shall see ; I am going to ask you a question, on your answer mine depends."

"Go on."

"Are you a good dancer ?"

"I think I may say yes without vanity," he replied.

"Then I, too, consent. So now, Giulia, we are both in the same boat. Oh ! what a talk there will be about it !"

"And will not Don Jose be furiously jealous !" whispered Giulia, laughing and blushing.

As for Edward Blake, he was in a glow of triumph.

He could not but be sensible to the great beauty of the marquis's daughter, and though he had by no means forgiven her or meant to forgive her for her seemingly cruel neglect, he felt elated at the thought of the envy his good fortune would excite.

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD BLAKE DANCES THREE TIMES WITH THE FAIR
GIULIA.

DON JOSE de MALATESTA was a shrewd and crafty man, and one who would not neglect small means to gain his ends.

Although very wealthy, he was very avaricious.

Nevertheless, he did not show his avarice in petty meanness.

Hence it was that, having set his mind on winning the beautiful heiress of the rich Marquis d'Almaviras as his wife, he did not fail to behave liberally to all the domestics of the household who could in any way assist his suit, or who might, if they chose, damage him in her eyes.

To the major-domo he was especially liberal, for that functionary held a post of great confidence.

It had come to the knowledge of Don Jose that he had the responsible task of sifting all letters addressed to the young lady, and could stop, or cause to be given to her whatever he chose.

This was an important affair.

Besides, the house steward knew everybody who came or went, whom she gave interviews to, and whom she refused to see.

In fact, he knew all about the inner life of the villa ; and, though she knew it not, every action almost of his young mistress was duly chronicled, and when it suited, made use of.

Not that he was a traitor to the master whom he served —far from it. But, nevertheless, Sebastian did not see why he should not make a profit out of trifling bits of information—mere gossip, in fact—which would do no one any harm.

Giulia d'Almaviras was quite right when she said that Don Jose would be furiously jealous at her dancing several times with the Englishman.

He watched her dance a cotillon with Blake first, and felt enraged.

He was about going up to her to ask her to dance with

him the next dance, when this cursed fellow whirled her away in a waltz.

Again and again they went round—the fair Giulia's eyes sparkling, her face flushing, with the pleasurable excitement.

"Will they never have done?" muttered Don Jose. "Who can this cursed fellow be?"

Then he bethought himself of Sebastian, the major-domo, and presently espying him moving about, superintending all the arrangements, he beckoned him to where he stood leaning against a pillar—the picture of jealous rage.

"Who in the name of all the devils is that fellow your young mistress is dancing with?" he asked.

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

"This is the second dance she has danced with him," said Don Jose, in tones of concentrated rage.

"Indeed, senor!"

"Don't you know who he is at all——"

"I know not who he is," said the steward, cautiously, "but—but——"

"But what?—speak out, man."

"I know something, but I am afraid I must not speak, for see, senor, I hold a most responsible and confidential post, and I would not for worlds betray the confidence reposed in me."

Don Jose thought he knew how to overcome the scruples of the steward, and quietly slipped a couple of gold doubloons into his hand.

"No betrayal of confidence at all, my good fellow," he said; "am I not a friend of the family and a suitor for the hand of the Lady Giulia—and is not my suit favoured by the marquis? I ask you that, Sebastian."

"Your worship is right, and I thiuk I may speak without doing wrong."

"Speak then."

"The senor with whom she is dancing is a very particular friend."

"Diavolo," muttered Don Jose, "how know you that?"

"He came this evening with the senorita's own card as his admission ticket, and right well I know that she very, very seldom honours any one so far as that."

An oath muttered between his clenched teeth was Don Jose's reply to this.

"Well, go on—what more do you know?"

"I think he must be a foreigner by his accent, though he speaks Spanish well."

"His name—I suppose you announced him?"

"Ah! Senor, I cannot be sure of the name. It sounded like Blaque."

"Any title?"

"No title, only plain senor."

"Who the devil can he be?"

"A dangerous rival," said Sebastian, who felt really interested in the success of Don Jose's suit. "See how her ladyship seems to enjoy the dance."

In a moment or two the couple whirled by, and the Spaniard cursed most bitterly as he looked on. Giulia seemed to have given herself up to the passionate intoxication of the waltz.

Her eyes, full of lustre, seemed melting with languishing love.

Her head half reclined on her partner's shoulder, while he, with arm around her waist, gazed rapturously into her lovely face.

For the time all his anger had vanished, and he lived but in the rapture of the present, basking in the light of her eyes and bright smile.

"If they dance together once more," said the major-domo, "it is dangerous; indeed, *I never saw the senorita look on any one as she does on him to-night!*"

Don Jose could bear no more. With an oath, not muttered, but aloud, he rushed from the saloon into the open air.

"By all the saints!" he cried aloud when he was alone in the grounds, "but this must be put a stop to—it shall be put a stop to—I myself will put a stop to it. This very night I will have an explanation with Giulia. This very night I will tell her that she must and shall be mine. And by the great God of heaven she shall. By fair means or foul—Giulia d'Almaviras shall be my wife."

After his burst of feeling and terrible oath, Don Jose grew gradually cooler, and after pacing hurriedly to and fro

for some ten minutes, muttering ever and anon to himself, he seemed to have decided on some plan of action, and returned to the ball saloon.

His grew face almost livid when he saw that Giulia was dancing yet a third dance with the favoured stranger.

"That man shall die!" he muttered, grinding his teeth.
"He shall die as sure as there is a God in heaven."

Could Giulia have seen his face then, and known he was thinking of her, she would have been horrified, and have felt no further pleasure in the dance.

She knew he would be jealous, but dreamed not of the tempest of passion which raged in his breast.

Don Jose suppressed all outward show of his rage, and, going to the steward, asked for wine.

As Sebastian brought the wine, he said significantly—

"She has danced with him yet a third time, Don Jose."

"I know it," he replied sullenly; and then added, with sudden fury: "It is his death-warrant!"

The steward recoiled with half a shudder at the terrible, the demoniacal expression which crept over the face of Don Jose as he spoke these words.

The latter drained off not one, but two, goblets of wine.

As he tossed off the last, the music ceased—the dance was at an end.

"See," said Sebastian, "he is leaving her. Will you not go and speak to her now?"

"No," was the abrupt reply. "When I do speak, I shall speak to the purpose. When I strike, I shall strike home."

And with these words he strode away.

Sebastain looked after him with something like terror.

"What an awful temper! He looks like a demon. I much fear that there will be bloodshed follow this."

As for Edward Blake, we have said that, intoxicated with the beauty of Giulia, his resentment was for the time driven to the winds.

His triumph seemed completed. He noticed, with proud joy, the envious glances cast on him as he, the favoured one, danced again and yet again with the marquis's lovely daughter.

Observed, too, with pride, the looks of curiosity and the

whisperings with which he was favoured when he had finished the third dance.

As he conducted his beautiful partner to a seat, that she might rest after the fatigue of two fast dances in succession, he said—

“One more let me crave, later in the evening—only one more.”

“Ah! insatiable that you are,” she said deprecatingly; “already the people will be talking about us.”

“Let them talk. *Honi soit qui mal y pense,*” he replied promptly.

She smiled, and he went off in triumph, for she had not refused him, and that was tantamount to consent; at least, so he persuaded himself.

He went out into the open air, and, by degrees, as he got cool, the memory of his wrongs returned.

“Ah! the treacherous siren, she has been my ruin, and remorselessly she has seen me disgraced, and yet—and yet—I love her!”

Then, with strange inconsistency, he cursed her, and next proceeded to speculate as to whether she would or would not dance with him once again.

Presently he remembered that he had engaged to dance with the fair American, and returning to the saloon, sought and found her.

Perhaps the change from one beautiful partner to another had its effect.

Be that as it may, the misery of his wrongs and misfortunes gradually returned, and with it resentment at the lovely cause thereof.

“Ah! if I could only win her heart, and then cast her from me with scorn, with words of insult and contempt, that would indeed be a splendid revenge. I believe her proud heart would break.”

He danced the three dances with Ethelinda, and after a time thought that she was almost, if not quite, as beautiful as Giulia.

And though her style was not so passionate and dazzling as that of the Spanish beauty, still she was more amiable, more lovable, he said to himself.

And so the evening waned on with beautiful music, merry laughter, gay dresses and uniforms flitting about, and all was mirth and revelry.

"Have you anything on your mind?" asked Ethelinda, when, after the third dance, he conducted her to a seat, and took his place beside her.

"No, indeed. Did I dance badly?"

"By no means, excellent; but nevertheless, Senor Blake, I am sure you have something on your mind. You are not at your ease."

He coloured, but made no reply.

CHAPTER XI.

EDWARD BLAKE'S ASSASSINATION PLANNED.

DON JOSE DE MALATESTA disappeared from the scene for fully an hour.

He went out to the gate and dispatched a mounted messenger, one of the outriders who rode before his carriage, with a note to be delivered in an obscure and disreputable part of Havannah.

He told the man to ride full gallop, and not to spare his horse, though the animal drooped with fatigue.

Then he told the porter that in about an hour and a half a person would call for him at the gate, desiring that he might be apprised of it at once.

In an hour and a half precisely there came a man wrapped in a large cloak, and with his face almost hidden by a broad-brimmed hat.

To him Don Jose went out at once, and walking a little way from the gate, conversed with him for a short time.

"You have a good man with you?"

"A first-rate man, your lordship. He has cut more throats than any man in the profession in Havannah."

"Hush! mind what you say. Now understand me, this affair must be done to-night, and that cleanly and completely. The reward is most liberal."

"How much, senor?"

"A hundred doubloons—a hundred gold doubloons, and for an unarmed man."

"But is he unarmed?"

"Certainly. He came unarmed, and will leave unarmed."

"How shall I know him?"

"He is in neither uniform nor court dress; he wears a cap, and not a hat, and to make all sure, when he comes out, *the porter will also run out, leaving the gate open, and will look hard after him.* I will arrange that."

"But suppose he hires a carriage?"

"I will see that that shall be impossible. My servants shall engage them all before, and pay them a part down."

"Good, my lord; consider it's done. Shall I wait on you to-morrow?"

"Yes, with the news that it is finished. But let me caution you. Do not attempt anything near here. The whole road, for a couple of miles, will be thronged with people returning from the *réveil*. It will not do for either of you to be taken, not that I should care in the least about you suffering death by the hands of the executioner, but you might attempt to implicate me."

"Thanks for your kind wishes, my lord."

"You are welcome," said Don Jose coolly. "See and do your business, and come for your hundred doubloons. See to it."

The marquis then sauntered back again, as though he had only been giving some ordinary directions to a servant.

He now arranged with the porter, who knowing Edward Blake, by the fact of his presenting his young mistress's card, promised to obey implicitly.

To do him justice, he had not the least notion why he was to leave his gate open, and come out and watch to see which way the young man went.

And thus the assassination of Edward Blake was quickly and skilfully planned.

Already he had suffered disgrace, and all but ruin, through the lovely Spaniard, and now, though he knew it not, death stared him in the face.

Ah! if Giulia could only have known the terrible consequences to follow from Don Jose's jealous rage, she would

not have danced three times with the Englishman, or at all events, she would not have looked so soft and lovingly on him, while her detested suitor's evil eyes were upon them.

Presently Don Jose sought out Giulia.

"Giulia, a few words with you in private. I have something important to say."

"Will not to-morrow do?" she asked, "I want to dance now."

"To-morrow will not do," he replied sternly. "I shall not detain you many minutes. Let us come out into the open air; the night is quite warm and fine."

With a sigh, Giulia accompanied him, expecting something unpleasant, but not dreaming of what was actually coming.

"Giulia," he said, calling her familiarly by her Christian name, "you are aware that I am a suitor for your hand?"

"I ought to be," she said pettishly. "You have told me so, often enough."

"You know that I have your father's entire consent to my suit?"

"I neither know nor care. What I do know is, that you have not my consent, and never shall have, Don Jose."

And as she spoke, she looked him boldly in the eyes.

A terrible expression came over his face.

"Giulia, there will be bloodshed for this night's work; and that is not all."

"Bloodshed!" she cried, turning pale. "For what? whose blood shall be shed?"

"I saw you dance three times consecutively with some unknown rascalion of an adventurer, a fortune-hunter, I suppose?"

"And what of that, can I not dance with whom I please?"

"No!" he cried fiercely; "or, if you do, let the man's blood be on his head."

She trembled at the tone of his voice, and the savage look on his face, as she spoke.

"I shall do as I please," she said boldly, "and laugh at your insolent threats."

"You will do as you please," he said, slowly. "We shall see. Listen to me, Giulia d'Almaviras. You shall be my wife!"

"Never!" she cried, excitedly.

"I swear by all that is most sacred on the earth," he said,

"that by fair means or foul means, you shall be my wife—or—or—"

"Or what?" she asked as boldly as she could, though her heart sank within her.

"Or my mistress, by fair means or foul——"

The hot blood rushed to her face, the blood of Old Castile, that had never yet borne insult tamely.

Her pride, her modesty, her maidenly dignity, were all deeply wounded by this bitter, this ruthless insult.

She—the proud daughter of the proud Marquis d'Almaviras, to be thus outraged at her father's own villa!

Her rage broke through all control.

She panted and glared at him like an angry tigress.

"Coward! infamous wretch! and monster! Would to God I had a weapon."

Then she struck him with the back of her hand in the face, and darted away.

"I will go and seek my cousin, Don Rodrigues," she cried to him; "he will kill you for this insult."

Don Jose remained motionless for a minute or more.

"What a vixen; what a she-devil. She seems untameable. Ah! ha! but we shall see—we shall see. I will dare all—risk all. I fear not d'Almaviras's vengeance, nor that of this fire-eating cousin. It would be as well though to have him put out of the way at once. They say he is a devil of a swordsman, and though I am no child with the weapon myself, it is not worth while running any risk. Strong measures must be resorted to. I must carry her off, and that at once. When I have got her safely in my power, when she is mine by possession, then, ah! then, she will be but too glad to be made my wife. It must be done at once, and Bosco is the man to do it. I will see him this very night."

Then Don Jose went to the gate and dispatched another mounted messenger.

He sent a brief note addressed to Il Capitano Bosco, at an obscure tavern near the Custom-house quay.

Thus ran the note:—

"CAPTAIN Bosco,—Meet me, without fail, at the wine-shop in the Toledo, at half-past twelve, precisely—without fail—on affairs of importance.
MALATESTA."

It was now eleven o'clock, and some of the company who had far to go, or who wished to be home early, were already leaving.

Giulia d'Almaviras, deeply agitated by her interview with Don Jose, and still burning with indignation at the gross insult offered her, sought and found her friend, Ethelinda Verinder.

The Yankee girl had singular influence over Giulia, and soon succeeded in calming her agitation and persuading her there was nothing to fear.

"As for the insult," she said, "of course he must be called to account for that ; but as for the man, he is not to be feared. A contemptible, blustering coward ! Believe me, Giulia, the fellow is a ruffian. Speak to your cousin when you see him, and meanwhile, dismiss him from your thoughts. He will not trouble you again to-night, believe me."

"Oh, Ethel ! he threatened such dreadful things. He gave me to understand that there should be bloodshed—that the senor with whom I danced to-night three times should be killed."

Ethelinda thought for a moment or two.

"I believe the man is villainous enough to hire an assassin, though too great a coward to risk his own body in a fight. I will warn this gentleman. Do you know whether he came armed ?"

"I am sure he did not," said Giulia ; "he let drop as much accidentally, as he talked. He said, I think, that he would be an easy, though unprofitable prey for robbers ; for that he had no arms and only half a dounloon in money about him. Then he made some Latin quotation—*Cantabit*—I forgot the rest."

"*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator,*" said Ethel, smiling, "which means—he who has nothing can sing in the presence of robbers. You must know, Giulia, that we Yankee girls are taught Latin. But, seriously, I will go and look for this Mr. Blake. He shall not be assassinated, or run the risk of it without warning. Can you get such things as a sword and revolver pistol, with ammunition, dear ?"

"Of course I can ; at least, Sebastian, our major-domo, will do so for me. I will tell him I want them just for fear. He will not refuse me, I know ; besides, he dare not."

She then started off to find Sebastian, while Ethel found Edward Blake, who now, a ter nursing and brooding over his wrongs for some half-hour, was as miserable and morose as possible.

"Mr. Blake, I have something to say to you very particular, and you must no.. laugh at it."

He bowed, and waited for her to proceed.

"You know that you have excited jealousy and animosity through daneing so often with Giulia. Now, it has come to my ears that your life has been threatened. You must know that in this beautiful town of Havannah there are such wretches as bravoes—hired assassins. Now, I beg of you to be on your guard going home. Pray do not neglect this warning."

"I am deeply grateful to you for the interest you take in me. I promise you I will not neglect your warning."

"You are unarmed. I will see that you have a sword and revolver pistol, with ammunition ; and then, even if you are attacked, you will have an excellent chance, for I am told these assassins never use firearms ; they rely altogether on the dagger or sword. Are you going soon ?"

"In twenty minutes from this time I have an appointment with a friend, who will meet me half-way on the road."

"I must go and find Giulia, and I will see that the major-domo, when he hands you your cap and cloak, also gives you the sword and pistol. Adieu, for the present."

"Ah ! Miss Verinder, how can I ever be sufficiently grateful for this undeserved kindness?" he cried, impetuously seizing her hand and kissing it.

"There, there, that will do," she cried, laughing and blushing. "Giulia will be jealous, Edward."

Then, before he could stop her or say a word, she darted away.

Ethelinda soon found her friend, and proceeded to tell her of the arrangements she had made for the safety of the young English officer.

"He would accept neither the carriage nor the eseort," said Ethel, "I am sure ; so, dear Giulia, you need trouble yourself no more on that point."

Giulia shrugged her pretty shoulders, and frowned ; she disliked having her offer refused.

"I want to tell you what I am going to do," she said, after a pause ; "I think you will agree with me that I am bound to make some acknowledgment of this young man's gallant conduct the other night, bound, in fact, to make him some substantial recompense."

Ethelinda looked grave and doubtful.

"I don't see how it can be done," she said.

"Nonsense ; I do. See here." The Senorita d'Almaviras then produced a heavy gold chain, to which was attached a watch of exquisite workmanship. Ethel took it in her hand and regarded it with admiration.

"It is very beautiful, and must also be extremely valuable. The jewels alone with which the watch is studded must be worth a large sum. This centre stone, I perceive, is a diamond, and both a large and brilliant one."

"That gem alone, Ethel," said Giulia, with an air of triumph, "is worth three hundred doubloons, and each of the smaller ones, ten in number, are worth fifty doubloons a piece."

"This splendid piece of jewellery, then," said Ethel in astonishment, "must be worth at least nine hundred doubloons."

"It is worth a thousand doubloons (a Spanish gold doubloon is worth over three pounds sterling), Ethel," replied the young Spanish beauty.

"Heavens !" cried Ethel, "more than fifteen thousand dollars ; or three thousand pounds English money !"

"Yes, I believe so," said Giulia, with quiet satisfaction.

"And are you really mad enough to offer such a present to this young officer ?" asked Ethelinda ; "he will consider it an affront."

"Affront !" cried Giulia, flushing up, and her beautiful eyes flashing with anger. "It is I shall have reason to feel affronted, should he be insolent enough to refuse my offered present."

"Very well, Giulia, have your own way. You will find, however, that I am right and you wrong."

"Let it be so then. The fact of his being insolent enough to refuse my gifts with rudeness will cancel all obligations of gratitude for the slight service he rendered us. I shall

see you again presently, Ethel; I shall go and seek him now."

And replacing the watch in its little case, she hurried away

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRESENT REFUSED.

THE lovely Giulia d'Almaviras found Edward Blake in a sort of conservatory or green-house connected with one of the saloons on the first floor of the villa.

It was lighted, but not brilliantly, and the moonbeams, streaming through the vines and glass, struggled with the artificial light of the coloured lanterns, producing a strange, ghost-like effect.

Giulia had been hurrying from room to room ; and this, with the effect of her talk with Ethel Verinder, caused her to be flushed and excited.

The young officer, who had been again brooding over his wrongs, his shattered prospects, and gloomy future, received her coldly, almost haughtily.

There was nothing absolutely offensive or rude in his manner, but she felt chilled and discouraged thereby.

However, she had made up her mind to do a certain thing—had told her friend Ethel that she would do so, and like a self-willed, passionate, impulsive girl as she was, went about it at once in the worst possible way, in the manner most certain to cause offence to the hot-headed and proud young man before her.

"Senor Blake," she said hurriedly, nervously, "I wish to make you some recompense for what you have done for me and for any inconvenience you have suffered."

Foolishly enough, she spoke in English, though she did not know the language at all well, while he spoke Spanish almost perfectly.

Hence arose fresh cause of misunderstanding—fresh reason for offence on his part.

"I'm convinced!" he said to himself, colouring up with indignation. "She speaks calmly of my ruin incurred for her as inconvenience, and talks of recompensing me."

He merely bowed, and said with suppressed satire—

"Really, senorita, you are too good—too condescending."

There was nothing in the words, but the tone jarred painfully on her ear.

"Nevertheless," she continued, "see here, senor," opening the little case in which lay the jewelled watch and chain, "is not this pretty—is it not charming?"

He took it from her hand and minutely inspected it.

"It is, indeed, extremely handsome and doubtless valuable," he said, handing it back to her.

"Yes, it is valuable," she went on. "These diamonds are of the first water, and, moreover, they possess this singular advantage, that they can be removed, all or separately, without in any way spoiling the watch. I mean that it would appear, though all were taken out, as though there had never been any jewels there."

"That is a novelty, certainly," he replied indifferently, "but I scarcely see the advantage of it."

"Ah! bah! how stupid you are!" she said, with a little laugh; "do you not perceive that if at any time the owner of this watch should wish for money—for gold in place of these glittering jewels, which, though pretty, are really very useless—all he would have to do would be to take out one or as many as he wanted. Diamonds are like gold, they have a certain fixed value, and there is not a large town in the world where there are not diamond merchants who will either sell or buy."

"I perceive," he said, freezingly. "I cannot say that inestimable advantage of the arrangement did at first occur to me."

Still, though his tone and manner should have warned her she was treading on dangerous ground, she persisted in her intention.

"Ah! senor, perhaps some day you may experience the convenience of this arrangement."

This speech prepared him for what was coming, but he said never a word.

He first flushed up, and then turned deadly pale, his eyes flashing angrily.

"It is for you, senor; I beg you will accept it as a present from me—as some acknowledgment and recompense."

"Recompense!"

He ground his teeth and cursed inwardly at the insulting word.

She placed the watch and chain in his hand herself, retaining the little case.

He held it for a time in dead silence.

A silence so long and profound that she felt embarrassed and uneasy.

"Well, señor?"

It seemed as though it were only by a great effort he found words.

"Senorita d'Almaviras," he said, after a sort of gasp, and in a husky voice, which trembled with passion, "I could dash this cursed bauble into pieces at your feet."

"Señor!" she cried angrily.

"Hear me out," he said in tones of concentrated rage, and do not presume to interrupt. I wanted but this crowning insult to complete your cruel treachery. You have brought on me disgrace and ruin. Not content with that, you now insult me grossly. Take your paltry watch, and may the curse of a ruined and disgraced man—no, I must remember—I am a gentleman, and will not curse a woman, however deep the injury and insult I have suffered. Take your watch, I say."

But she made no attempt to take it. On the contrary, she shrunk back as though frightened.

Then he carelessly half dropped it, half threw it, into a vase in which was planted a tropical flower.

The aim was a trifle incorrect, for although the watch fell in the vase, the chain hung over, and the weight dragged the watch over.

The vase was about four feet from the ground, and as the watch fell he knew by the sound that at least the glass was broken, if no further damage was done.

She had remained all this time silent and motionless as a statue, save when she shrunk back for a moment.

Deadly pale she was, and trembled violently, for this haughty daughter of Spain had never before been so spoken to.

Presently she gave utterance to a broken gasp, and then, the spell being broken, spoke rapidly and decidedly in her own language.

"Leave my presence, this moment. How dare you thus insult me, ignorant that you are ! Leave me, I say. Go ! proud, arrogant Englishman. Were it not for the service you have rendered me, I would order my father's servants to fling you from the door. Leave me, I say, instantly."

"With great pleasure, Senorita d'Almaviras. It was a cursed day for me I ever saw you."

Then, with a haughty bow, he stalked silently away.

She remained standing for a moment or two, watched him till out of sight, and then cowering, shrinking away, she hid herself among the luxuriant foliage of exotic plants, and falling on her knees with one wild gasp, gave way to a storm of passion and of sobs.

These were tears of rage and mortification, more than sorrow.

Bitter tears wrung from her proud heart, by her sense of the utter scorn with which he treated her and her offered gift.

Presently she grew more composed, and tried to think, to reason with herself.

"What an eventful evening this has been !" said she with a sigh ; "nothing but trouble ; first I am insulted, and have a deadly quarrel with Don Jose de Malatesta, then by this mad Englishman. Well, no matter, we have seen the last of him. We shall never meet again, at all events on speaking terms."

L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.

Little did Giulia think under what strange, exciting, terrible circumstances they would next meet.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ASSASSINS MEET WITH MORE THAN THEIR MATCH.

BLAKE accepted the arms offered him, but not without a struggle with his pride. He placed the pistol in his breast pocket, and the sword under his naval cloak, in such a way that no one would suspect he was armed.

He passed out, said good night to the fat and sleepy porter at the gate, who nevertheless strictly observed the directions of Don Jose de Malatesta, left the gate wide open,

and coming out into the road, looked earnestly after the departing guest.

The latter walked briskly on, in utter ignorance—not dreaming that he was a marked man.

He walked fast for some ten minutes, and then, slackening his speed, lighted a cigarette, and proceeded more leisurely.

He halted all at once, thinking he heard footsteps behind him. A cloud was over the moon at the moment, and though he looked hard and earnestly, he could see no living thing.

Having seen the pistol right, that every barrel was cocked, that the powder was in each nipple, and that it was properly capped, he walked on again in a quiet, leisurely manner.

"I shall begin to look out for Jack O'Brien soon," he said to himself; "I think he is sure to come and meet me."

Hitherto the road had been always open, at least on one side, so that there was abundance of room, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any one to approach close unawares.

But now the road narrowed and led between a sort of avenue of trees, whose branches spreading across rendered it much darker.

Still, Edward Blake had no thought of danger, and walked leisurely on, deep in thought.

This avenue, as it may be called, was about three-quarters of an English mile in length, and beyond he could see the open road bathed in the moonlight.

Several times he thought he heard noises to the right and left, a crackling as of a broken branch trodden upon, or something similar.

But though for the moment, as the saying is, he "pricked up his ears," he paid little attention to it, and as he approached the end of the trees, kept a bright look out for his friend, Jack O'Brien.

He had arrived within twenty yards of this, and in another two minutes or so would have been out in the open moonlight, when he was suddenly startled by a loud whoop or yell, and the appearance of a man armed bounding towards him.

At such a time, or under the like circumstances, even the bravest might be excused for being momentarily disconcerted—even terrified.

Blake bounded backwards, and, with heart beating at double its usual rate, felt for his pistol.

Before he could draw it, the man again made a run, or rather several bounds towards him, and he perceived he was armed with a short sword.

The young man now rapidly recovered his self-possession, and loosening the fastening of his cloak, he grasped the sword in his right hand, then cocked the revolver in his left.

It had always been a pet theory of his that an officer armed with a sword should always use a pistol with the left hand.

By great practice he had arrived at such perfection that he could aim as well with the left, even better than with the right.

This was a wonderful point in his favour.

Scarcely had he loosened the clasp of his cloak and made these preparations, when the assassin was upon him.

He was evidently unprepared for the fact of the intended victim being armed—for hitherto the sword he carried had been concealed by the cloak.

Accordingly, when he made a savage cut at Blake's head and found that it was skilfully received on a sword blade, he staggered back with an oath. But apparently thinking that though the affair was not so easy as it looked, he could still accomplish it without fail, he returned to the attack, at the same time shouting some words whose import unfortunately the young officer did not catch.

Had he done so, he would have been warned that the villain had a confederate, and that he called to him to attack the victim behind.

The bravo found he had got a much tougher customer than he expected or bargained for.

He was a powerful man—skilful with the weapon he wielded.

But Blake's was both heavier and longer, and he being also a good swordsman, it gave him a tremendous advantage.

The villain was forced after the interchange of a few passes, to act entirely on the defensive.

Then he began to retreat, each moment more rapidly, as Blake continued to press him more fiercely. Of course the assassin could not see behind him, nor had he time to look over his shoulder.

So all at once it happened that he came full butt with his back against a tree. For the moment he could retreat no further.

That moment was fatal to him.

With a cry of fury and triumph Blake bounded forward, and with one vigorous thrust drove his sword right through his body, absolutely pinning him to the tree.

It took him a moment to withdraw his weapon.

Then, with a shriek of mortal agony, the bravo fell to the earth, where he lay writhing in the agonies of death.

And at that very moment Edward Blake, who had an exceedingly quick ear, caught the sound of another foot-step.

Before he could turn round he found himself attacked by another man who had crept on him as noiselessly as possible from behind.

His sword, wet with the blood of the man he had run through the body, got somehow entangled in his cloak, which, unfortunately, he had not entirely thrown off, and before he could make a proper guard, the second villain delivered a cut at his head.

He staggered back, hoping so to avoid the cut.

His own sword only partially warded it off, and at the same moment stumbling over the wounded man, he fell towards the ground, and the sword at the same moment flew from his grasp.

The second assassin now had the desperate game of life and death in his own hands.

He proceeded with cruel deliberation to shorten his sword, and prepare himself for the slaughter.

He felt sure that the victim could not escape him, as he seemed half stunned, and his sword had flown more than a yard away from him.

"Ah! Guiseppe," he said, apostrophysing his dying

comrade, "at all events, I shall avenge you, and what is more, I shall get the whole of the reward."

Then he proceeded with terrible deliberation to deliver the fatal thrust.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ABDUCTION OF THE SENORITA PLANNED.

DON JOSE DE MALATESTA remained longer at the villa of the Marquis d'Almaviras than he intended, and Blake had been gone half an hour when he entered his carriage at the gate.

He had heard nothing of the solicitude evinced by the two ladies towards Edward Blake in sending him forth armed, or he would have been even more savage and furious than he was.

"Did you do as I directed you with regard to that English fellow?" he asked of the old porter.

"I did, my lord," was the reply; "I left the gate wide open, and stared after him till he was out of sight."

"Good; that will do," said Don Jose, and carelessly tossed him a piece of gold.

Then he entered his carriage, and ordered the coachman where to take him.

"Drive like fury to the end of the Strad del Toledo," he said, "and do not go by the road; go round by the way of the Capuchin convent. Don't spare my horses, but use all speed."

"My lord, the way you name is a good two leagues farther."

"No matter. Do as I order you, and make no remarks."

The route Don Jose had ordered his coachman to take was fully double as far as the straight road into the town, by which Blake and the assassins had gone.

The fact of the matter was, Don Jose did not want to see, hear, or be compelled to know anything about the terrible tragedy which must have been enacted by this time.

It would be awkward to pass a dead body in the road.

Or perchance he might not be dead, only dying, and then

his servants would want to stop, and it would look both strange and suspicious should he order them to proceed.

The coachman made such good speed that in about an hour the heavy chariot was lumbering through the streets of Havannah.

At the end of the street called Toledo, in the west quarter of the town, the horses were pulled up, and their owner alighted.

It was now more than an hour past midnight, but this had been a great *fête* day, and every wine-shop, especially places of bad repute, were open.

Don Jose seemed to know his way well, and after threading several narrow lanes and alleys, entered a low-looking wine-shop in a street a little wider and more decent than those he had passed through.

On one side of a long room were a series of boxes, with curtains across the upper part, such as may be seen in many English eating and coffee houses. Stalking up to the end, Don Jose took his seat at the last box of all, which had only room for two.

There were two people in the next box to him, and their tongues told that they were English—sailors from some of the ships, the don said to himself, as this was a part of the town where the jolly tars on the spree used to congregate.

Taking no heed of them, the Spanish noble called for wine, and when it was brought proceeded to revile it and the landlord.

"You need not drink it, senor, unless you like," said the host, angrily.

"I do not intend to," replied Don Jose insolently. "I don't object to pay for it; but I do to being poisoned."

The proprietor was about to make an angry answer, when another person appeared on the scene.

"I wish you a good night, my lord," he said, respectfully doffing his cap.

"Good night, Bosco. Sit down; I want to talk to you."

At hearing him called my lord, and seeing the respect which Bosco, an old customer, paid to him, a great change came over the manner of the host, and he now no longer showed any signs of anger.

"Who are those people in the next box?" asked Don Jose, cautiously. "Do you know them?"

Bosco, whom our readers will of course recognise as the slaver-captain known as Bosco Negro or Black Bosco, listened for a moment.

"They are English," he said. "Sailors, I suppose. This is a great neighbourhood for them."

"They can't understand what we say, even if they overhear?"

"Not a word; do not fear, my lord. I will, with your permission, talk bad Spanish negro patois—and then, if your lordship will deign to do the same, there can be no possible danger."

"Good. Now listen to me."

Then Don Jose, after looking cautiously around to make sure that there were no others within ear-shot, commenced.

"I have business on hand for you. Business which must be done at once, and promptly—dangerous business."

"Tell me its nature, my lord; I don't shirk danger, as a rule."

"Are you prepared to run a heavy risk for a heavy stake?"

"I am," replied the slave-captain bluntly, after thinking for a few moments.

"That was an unfortunate affair, the loss of your vessel, with her cargo of slaves, almost in sight of port."

"Ah! my lord, do not mention it, it wrings my heart. All my hard-earned, honest gains lost at one run. Your lordship must also have been a heavy loser," he added.

"Well, I should think so. I lost not only the slaves, the cost of the voyage, and so forth, but even the vessel. But let us get on."

"You feel sure those fellows in the next box can't understand?"

At that very moment the people in question called the waiter, and it was abundantly evident to Don Jose, by the difficulty they had in making themselves understood, that they knew no Spanish.

So Don Jose was perfectly satisfied, and proceeded to unfold his plans without the least fear or restraint.

He was wrong, however,

For one of those two men heard and understood every word.

"You would like to have a smart craft of your own, would you not, Bosco ?"

"Ah ! your lordship, don't talk about it."

"And it would be all the better if she was a fast sailer ?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Bosco, shrugging his shoulders, not exactly seeing to what this conversation tended.

"And if she had also steam power—a screw and good engines ?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Well, Bosco, my good friend, it is in your power to have such a vessel, to own her yourself, independent of me and all the world."

"Ah ! if that were but possible, I would make my fortune in a couple of years."

"What do you say to the *Vendetta* ?"

"What !" cried Bosco, in the utmost astonishment. "The splendid new clipper yacht your lordship has had specially built in Boston ! They say she sails like a witch, and can steam over twelve knots an hour."

"Quite true. She is now lying in the harbour all ready for sea. She has coals, provisions, even guns, small arms, and ammunition on board, for I thought of taking a cruise myself. All you will want would be a crew."

"Ah ! I could get a crew in six hours."

"Well, the yacht can be yours. A splendid vessel, of between four and five hundred tons, well found, and ready for sea. And moreover, a couple of handfuls of gold douploons, just to start you going. All this can be yours, if you dare but earn it."

The slave-captain's eyes gleamed, and leaning his elbows on the table, his chin on his hands, he asked—

"How ?"

"You know the Marquis d'Almaviras ?"

"I do. One of the wealthiest and most powerful noblemen in the island, or in Spain either, for the matter of that. I have reason to know," he added significantly.

"You know he has a daughter ?"

"I do—the Senorita Giulia. People say she is the loveliest lady and richest heiress in Cuba."

"Well, it is with her I have to do, or rather you will have to do, if you would earn your reward."

Don Jose paused for a moment or two, while the other said not a word, but looked him steadfastly in the face with those dark, treacherous, greedy, tigerish eyes of his.

"She must be carried off by force or stratagem, and that at once—to-morrow, even, if possible. She must be conveyed on board this very vessel, and then you must escape to sea with her."

As Don Jose spoke, his hearer's countenance fell, and gradually his complexion assumed a dull leaden colour.

"Well, Bosco, what do you say? Speak!"

"At any moment the Marquis d'Almaviras can cause me to be arrested and executed, that I know for a certain fact. Judge, senor, whether he would do so or not, were I to attempt to abduct his daughter and fail, or were I to succeed and afterwards he should discover I had a hand in it."

"Ah! bah! You must arrange so skilfully that it shall never be discovered."

"Nothing could save my neck from the accursed iron collar—the garotte—were the marquis even to suspect I had a hand in such a deed."

"Nonsense; besides, it's only a risk;" and then Jose added with grim pleasantry, "and besides, Bosco, many a better man than you has died on the scaffold, and gone to heaven, no doubt, singing *Ave Maria*."

"Your lordship is pleased to be witty at my expense. I do not look at the affair in the light of a joke, however."

"Very well, make up your mind; you know I pay liberally and promptly when my work is done. I give you five minutes to decide."

The five minutes passed, during which the occupants of the next box seemed in earnest conversation, nor gave the least sign that they had been paying any attention to what had passed between their neighbours.

The five minutes went by.

"Well, Bosco, your answer—*yes* or *no*?"

"What is to be done with the lady, even if she should be successfully carried off?"

"Ah! that we should have to decide. I was thinking

of taking her to some uninhabited island, and there leaving her, with sufficient provisions and necessaries to live. Then, in the course of a few weeks, I, in another vessel, would seek her out, pretend I knew nothing of the abduction, and tell her I had come to her rescue, having received information from a traitor among your crew as to where you had left her. She would then look on me as a hero, and feel bound to me by gratitude. We could even, if we thought proper, have a bit of a sham fight, and I in my vessel could defeat you in yours, and finally you could make your escape, leaving me covered with glory."

"The plan seems feasible enough," said Bosco, "if we could once get the girl on board."

"It must be done, Bosco ; it can be done, and shall be done. I have sworn I would marry that girl, unless, indeed, she should prefer a less honourable connection ; which I don't think likely."

"No, indeed," said Bosco musingly.

"Her spirits would be broken by her lonely residence on the desolate island," continued Don Jose, seeming to warm to his subject. "She would be utterly cowed. I would take care to have a priest on board, and the affair should be settled there and then. You would gain a splendid clipper vessel, with steam power and every thing found ; while I should wed the loveliest girl and richest heiress in the island."

"The risk is all on my side," said Bosco drily, "and the balance of advantage largely on yours."

"Well, don't let us bandy words. Yes or no, and then we will go into details."

"Yes, then," said Bosco doggedly. "I will run the risk. And now then, in the first place, are you acquainted with an uninhabited island, out of the track of ships, which would suit ?"

"I know the exact spot, the very island you want. It is in the Caribbean Sea. I came across it by accident. Here, I have got the latitude and longitude down in my pocket-book."

Then he read out—

"Lat.—S. ; long.—W. I named it Wedge Island, because in shape it's something like a gunner's quoin."

"That will do exactly. I'll make a memorandum of the latitude and longitude."

Strange to say, one of the Englishmen in the next box also produced a memorandum book, and proceeded carefully to note down the latitude and longitude of Wedge Island.

CHAPTER XV

EDWARD BLAKE DISCOVERS THE INSTIGATOR OF THE ASSASSINATION.

"AND now then we will proceed to talk about the best way of carrying the girl off. Have you anything to suggest?"

"Force won't do," replied Bosco, shaking his head.

"No; we must get her unawares, if possible."

"Aye, if possible."

"You think it difficult; but, my stupid Bosco, though a very good slave-captain, you would make a very bad general as planner of delicate operations. Now, I have already hit on a plan which I think certain of success."

"Your lordship has a longer head than I have," Bosco said, deferentially.

"You understand that the thing must be done at once, without a day's delay—to-morrow even, if possible."

"It is an affair of so unpleasant and dangerous a character that I shall be right glad when it is over, senor. Rest assured I shall be as anxious as you to get it done."

At this moment the landlord approached, and busied himself washing some glasses within earshot.

"Everything is ready, and I repeat that it must be done at once. All we have to do is to catch our bird, and then away with her on the wings of the wind, and by the aid of steam, to Wedge Island."

"Speak low, your lordship," said Bosco, who, his own life being in danger, had good reason to be cautious. "Although those hogs of English in the next box don't understand Spanish, the landlord does, and pretty sharp ears he's got too. He's pretty close to us now."

Thus admonished, Don Jose proceeded to unfold his plan, but almost in a whisper.

One of the men in the next box seemed greatly annoyed

at this, and took every possible means to hear, shifting his position so as to get as near as possible.

But in spite of all, he could only catch just a word or two here and there—not enough to give him any idea as to the nature of Don Jose's plan to abduct the beautiful heiress.

The two—the noble and the brutal slave-captain, fit companions in villainy, though so different in station—talked for fully a quarter of an hour.

But always in the same low tone.

"Very well, then," said Don Jose, rising; "the attempt shall be made at once, you say."

"To-morrow, if they are there, or the next day; or the first day they are seen. No cat ever kept a stricter watch over a mouse than shall these ladies be watched and waited for."

Don Jose threw down a piece of money in payment, and then walked out, followed by Blaek Bosco.

The two Englishmen also rose and hastily followed the villainous conspirators—one of them proceeding to get a long sword he carried in readiness.

Don Jose also carried a sword.

He had not gone a dozen yards, still conversing with his accomplice, when he felt himself rudely seized by the shoulder from behind and swung half round.

"Don Jose de Malatesta, I want you. I have business with you," said a stern voice in Spanish.

Don Jose turned savagely and laid his hand on his sword.

Black Bosco clapped his hand on a murderous-looking dirk he carried, and seemed prepared to fight for his principal.

"Look out for the other fellow, Jack," said the one who had addressed Don Jose, "I will deal with this villain."

"*Carrambo!*!" cried Don Jose, grinding his teeth; "who the devil are you, and what do you want?"

Meanwhile, Jack O'Brien—for he was one of the two men in the box—quietly drew a revolver, and cocking it, said to Bosco—

"Don't you interfere, my man, or I'll put a bullet through your brain. Both these gentlemen are armed with swords—let them settle their little difference in their own way—keep your distance, or I'll make cold meat of you very quick."

"Who am I, you ask? My name, Don Jose de Malatesta, is Edward Blake, and I have great pleasure in informing you that the two assassins you hired to murder me now lie dead, weltering in their blood on the road-side between this and the villa of the Marquis d'Almaviras, where you and I passed the evening. Defend yourself, villain, for I mean you to die by my hand. I mean to kill you as I killed both your bravoës."

Don Jose turned deadly pale, and drew back trembling.
The shock was a terrible one.

"Come, sir, defend yourself, or I will run you through the body."

The next moment the swords of the two clashed.

* * * * *

Some little explanation of this sudden appearance of Blake and Jack O'Brien is here necessary.

When he fell, what from the effect of the sword-cut but half warded off, and the shock of the fall together, Edward Blake lay half stupefied for some moments.

But though he lost his sword, he held fast to his revolver in his left hand.

The deliberation of the assassin was his own destruction, and the salvation of the intended victim. The former saw that his fallen antagonist had lost his sword, and did not think for a moment that he had a pistol ready for immediate use.

Steadying himself as quickly as possible, Blake lay still, but contrived, as the hired murderer approached, to get the pistol in a favourable position for instant use.

As the villain raised his arm to strike, the left hand of the young officer suddenly appeared from under his cloak, armed with the cocked and loaded pistol.

Aiming at the breast, he fired.

The next instant the assassin fell all of a heap.

All power seemed to go out of his limbs, as though he were struck by lightning.

Edward Blake arose, and proceeded to turn over the body, which lay on its face motionless, stone dead.

The bullet had struck the man on the upper lip just below

the nose, and crashing through the brain, of course caused instant death.

"Ah! my fine fellow," soliloquised Blake, "you are settled, safe enough. I'm glad I aimed low, if I had fired at his head instead of his breast, I, and not he, would be dead. Now we'll see how the other fellow gets on. I see he is still kicking and groaning."

He then proceeded to inspect the first of the two whom he had run through the body.

Raising the head of the would-be assassin, who groaned dismally the while, Blake proceeded to pour into his mouth, from which blood and froth were bubbling, a good dose of brandy.

This had the desired effect of partially clearing his throat, by causing him to cough and mutter, and also reviving the fast expiring spark of life.

"*Oh! ah! merci! Santissima Trinidadada! Carago!*!"

Thus the dying ruffian went on calling on the Holy Trinity, Blessed Virgin, and all the saints, in one breath, and the next moment using the most terrible oaths.

The last agony was upon him.

"Speak!" said Edward Blake. "The name—the name of the man who hired you to murder me."

"Don Jose—"

The dying man faltered.

"Speak, or die this instant!"

And with the words the knife was raised and gleamed ominously in the moonlight.

Then, as though by a last effort, there came these words—

"There were two."

"Their names?"

"Don Jose de Malatesta."

"Ah! I thought so. And the other?"

"The Senorita Giulia d'Almaviras."

CHAPTER XVI.

BLAKE RELATES TO O'BRIEN WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

THIS fell on Edward Blake's mind with stunning force. He believed it.

The man would not die with a lie on his lips, and such a lie, after swearing by all that Spaniards think most holy.

Edward Blake stood gazing down into the face of the dying man, now distorted alike by evil passions and pain.

"Senor—a doctor—you promised me a doctor—quick, or I shall bleed to death."

This recalled him to himself, and he looked up the road to see if there was any vehicle or human being in sight to help him with the dying man.

Presently he discerned in the moonlight a small black speck far up the road, and knew that it was some one approaching.

Taking out his pistol, which had done him such excellent service, he fired off two barrels, with the intention of attracting the notice of whoever it might be.

It had the desired effect, for he soon perceived that the figure, that of a man, had quickened its pace almost to a run.

A hollow groan from the wounded man attracted his attention, and he perceived that he was past human aid.

His face was fearfully distorted, and blood spirted from his mouth in jets.

The assassin was in the last agonies, and as the young Englishman looked at his livid face, he gave a shudder and a gasping cry, and all was over.

To make certain, he knelt by his side, and felt if his heart beat.

But life had for ever left the body of the lawless, godless bravo, who died as he had lived—by violence.

"Hallo! Blake," cried Jack O'Brien, breathlessly running up; "why, what the blazes is the matter—are these two men on the ground drunk, eh?"

"No, only dead," replied Blake, quietly; "they set upon me to assassinate me—hired bravoes they were, and in place of their killing me I killed them."

O'Brien, who had not gone through the excitement, was naturally considerably shocked, and in reply to his questions, his friend proceeded to relate to him what had happened.

"And now, Jack, we'll just haul these dead bodies on one side, and start for Havannah."

This was soon done, and the corpses of the two would-be

murderers laid side by side under a tree, their sightless eyes glaring up at the clear vault of heaven.

The two friends stepped out smartly for Havannah, and when the town was reached, Blake said—

"Jack, I don't feel inclined to go aboard yet—don't know that I shall all night. At any rate, I feel inclined to cruise about for an hour or two, and drink some of the bad black wine. It's a gala night, and these Spanish beggars, who sleep all day, will keep it up all night."

"We needn't have bad wine unless we choose. If we go into the Corso we can get good wine, either at Tremont Hall, the Yankee Hotel, or one of the first-class Spanish houses."

"No, Jack, I feel inclined for low life to-night. Besides, I must get accustomed to low company, sailors' grog-shops, and so forth ; for I must not forget that from the moment the court-martial sentence is approved, I am no longer an officer in her Majesty's service. I'm just an outcast, a pariah —dismissed the service with disgrace. I wonder will they play the 'Rogue's March' as I go over the gangway, when I bid a final adieu to the ship."

He spoke very bitterly, and Jack O'Brien endeavoured to cheer him up, and get him to look on things in a less gloomy light.

But it was all of no avail.

Edward Blake still kept up his manner of cynical, bitter satire, and the warm-hearted Irishman felt quite glad when they entered a low wine-shop in a low neighbourhood, and his companion called for a bottle not of the best but of the strongest wine.

They had not been there five minutes before Don Jose himself entered, to the great surprise of Blake, who was all but betraying himself. He felt inclined to rush upon the villain, seize him by the throat, denounce him as a hirer of assassins, and call him to account for his deed.

But chance, or perhaps something above chance, prevented this.

Edward Blake scarce knew why, himself, but a certain something prompted him to sit quiet and observe the action of the Spaniard.

It flashed across his mind—Perhaps he had appointed to

meet his bravoes here, learn the result of their attempt, and pay them the blood-money. And so it happened that Blake, knowing Spanish, heard every word of the infamous plot to carry off the lovely Giulia d'Almaviras.

Having made a note of the latitude and longitude of Wedge Island, where it was proposed to carry the girl when abducted, and also being aware that the attempt to carry her off would be made by water, he felt pretty sure of being able to defeat their plans. "She has returned me evil for good—has betrayed me, caused my ruin, and insulted me ; but I will save her from the fate which threatens her, and then—then I will tell the proud Spanish beauty to whom she owes her preservation."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUEL BETWEEN BLAKE AND DON JOSE DE MALATESTA.

As he listened to the plot for abducting the lovely daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras, Edward Blake felt a good deal staggered in his belief as to the complicity of the young lady in his attempted assassination.

"Surely," he said to himself, "she cannot be hand and glove in an assassination plot with this Don Jose, who is plotting against her !"

He pondered over this for a moment or two, and then the thought came—

"She, of course, knows nothing of Don Jose's designs against herself. Is it just possible, even probable, that in her fit of anger against me, she may have hastened to him, told him she hated me ; and then, who can say that the two did not become partners in iniquity, and plan my murder ?" But the more he thought of it, the more his mind revolted from the idea.

"It is too horrible. I cannot, *will not* believe that human nature—woman's nature—can be so utterly vile, monstrously wicked."

"And yet"—this came as an after-thought—"these Spaniards are a strange race—treacherous, vindictive, and passionate, almost beyond belief. And yet, I can't believe it ; I won't believe it. That wretch died with a lie on his lips."

His last thought, and final resolve, as he followed Don Jose and Bosco from the wine-shop, took this shape—

"Let it be as it may, whether she planned my death with this ruffian don or not, I will save her from her threatened fate, and call him to account for his villainy."

In a few moments more, Blake and Don Jose were engaged in mortal combat, O'Brien keeping Bosco quiet by means of his revolver pistol, which he levelled every now and again at the breast of the slave-captain.

The combat was not concluded at once.

Don Jose was a skilful swordsman, while Blake was far too impetuous, and once narrowly escaped being run through the body, the sword of the Spaniard passing under his arm, and even grazing his ribs.

The keen blades clashed and hissed like angry serpents, and for a while the issue of the combat was doubtful.

But presently the youth and vigour of Blake began to tell, as did also his superiority of sword in weight and length.

But just as victory seemed about to declare in favour of the Englishman, he slipped, all but fell, and received a wound in his right shoulder.

He recovered himself quickly, however, and after a moment's breathing-time the fight was again commenced.

People now came running to the spot, attracted by the clash of steel, and the affair grew more exciting each moment. Each combatant was encouraged by cries and shouts; the Spaniards taking part with Don Jose, while some English sailors cheered for the young officer, who was recognised by his uniform cap, with gold band and crown.

Jack O'Brien, too, had a deal to say, still keeping a sharp look-out on Black Bosco, who, but for his vigilance, would very quickly have rendered efficient aid to his principal.

"Keep your point lower, Blake, my boy. Spit him through the stomach. There's no ribs to turn the blade aside. Now you have him. Give him the Connemara thrust I taught you. Ah! then, *a ma diaoul!* that was a narrow shave."

Suddenly Blake got an unexpected advantage. The sword-blades became locked in some way, and in the natural order of things one or other of the combatants should have been disarmed

But either Blake was not prompt enough to seize the opportunity, or the don was skilful enough to avoid it.

An instant after, however, Don Jose lowered the point of his sword, sprang back, and sought shelter among the crowd, which was now every moment augmenting.

“The coward!” shouted Edward Blake, and reckless of consequences, dashed after him, exclaiming—“You shall not escape me thus.”

“My wrist is sprained,” cried Don Jose.

“It’s false. Coward and villain! Stand on one side, you people, while I settle accounts with this villain.”

Fortunate was it for the young Englishman that there were a good number of English sailors and marines present, or, as he impetuously rushed after his foe, he would most probably have got an ugly stab in the back.

Suddenly the tramp of feet was heard in measured cadence, and a body of armed men came sharply round the corner.

“Ha!” cried Don Jose in tones of triumph, “the night patrol. Arrest me this assassin who attacked me in the street. Officer of the guard, I am Don Jose de Malatesta.

“Assassin yourself! Coward and traitor!” shouted Edward Blake furiously. “Arrest Don Jose de Malatesta. I charge him with hiring two bravoes to murder me.

“Spaniards,” Blake cried in their own language, “this night, while returning from the *fête* of the Marquis d’Almaviras, I was set upon by two assassins. Fortunately, I was armed. One I shot through the head, the other I ran through the body. Both are now dead; but, before the second one died, I extracted from him—my sword at his throat—the name of the villain who employed him. That name was, as I suspected, Don Jose de Malatesta, who now shrinks away like the coward he is. Arrest him, officer of the guard. I charge him with attempted murder.”

Then, in a few brief words, Blake proceeded to address the English sailors and marines, of whom there were now a goodly number.

The Spaniards, on hearing this charge made by the Englishman against Don Jose, were, for the most part, silent. He was a powerful nobleman, and much dreaded by reason of the great influence he had with the authorities.

Some few murmurs of doubt, or pretended doubt, arose.
"Impossible! the Englishman speaks falsely."

"Viva Don Jose de Malatesta!" said one more enthusiastic than the rest.

"Down with Don Jose de Malatesta for a murdering scoundrel!" shouted Blake furiously. "Englishmen, stand by me! Officer of the guard, arrest Don Jose de Malatesta, on a charge of murder, of which I, an officer of her Britannic Majesty's ship —, accuse him."

"Down with the murdering Spaniard!" was the cry among the English sailors, and they clustered together, as if for an onslaught on the Spaniards.

Most of the British tars were at least half drunk, some quite so, while few were armed.

So that in case of a conflict, the odds would be heavily against them.

Don Jose and the Spaniards saw this, and hence their demeanour became more bold and defiant.

Malatesta himself laughed scornfully, and cried out—

"What an absurdity! Officer of the guard, do your duty, and arrest me this Englishman, who attempted to assassinate me. Arrest him, I say."

The officer, followed by the soldiers of the night patrol, advanced towards Blake.

"Englishmen, stand to me!" cried the latter, flourishing his sword. "I brand that man as an attempted murderer, and now he seeks to avoid the punishment of his crime by having me arrested."

"Seize him!" shouted Malatesta furiously.

"This for your heart, scoundrel!" cried Blake, firing his revolver.

Jack O'Brien, however, who, hot-blooded Irishman as he was, had on this occasion most prudence, struck up his hand, otherwise, it must have wounded some among the crowd, if it did not strike Don Jose.

No one save O'Brien saw whence the shot came, which, as events turned out, was fortunate.

Now, however, the balance of numbers, power, and authority, began to show on the side of Don Jose.

The officer of the patrol, who had hesitated for a moment

or two at first, was determined on effecting the arrest of the Englishman.

The soldiers were ordered to fix bayonets, and deploying into line, advanced towards Edward Blake.

"We must make a bolt of it, Blake, my boy," cried O'Brien, "or, be jabers, we'll be in quod before we know where we are."

"Bolt be ——" cried Blake excitedly. "I shall stand my ground, and if *I can* get a shot at that scoundrel, Dol. Jose, I'll put a bullet through his brain as sure as my name is Blake."

But though Edward Blake would not retreat, his more prudent friend so contrived that a number of English blue-jackets were between him and the Spanish soldiers.

The latter could not get at Blake, whom they were ordered to make prisoner, without first scattering the sailors and marines who covered him.

"Charge!" shouted the officer, whom Don Jose was previously urging on to arrest the Englishman. "Charge, men! be ready to fire if necessary."

Bloodshed seemed now imminent, when a diversion occurred.

Again the measured tramp of disciplined men was heard, and in half a minute a large picket of marines from the British men-of-war marched on the scene.

This produced a total change in the aspect of affairs.

The Spaniards had now an equal number of Englishmen, as well armed as themselves, arrayed against them, and it now became evident that the arrest of Blake would not be permitted by the officers in command of the British force.

Jack O'Brien, in a very few words, explained the state of affairs, and Edward Blake having been almost forced behind the ranks of the marines, the officer in charge advanced to parley with the one in command of the Spanish patrol.

The Englishman accused Don Jose of hiring assassins to murder him.

Don Jose, on his part, accused the Englishman of attempting to assassinate him in the street, and demanded his arrest.

Under the circumstances, a sort of compromise was arrived at.

It was agreed that the official, half magistrate, half police inspector, called *alcalde*, should have the case submitted to him, and his decision be abided by.

Accordingly, the whole party marched off to the part of the guard-room where that official sat ready to hear charges and commit prisoners to the cells, to be brought before a higher authority in the morning.

It was an imposing display of force which the Spanish patrol and English picket made together, as they marched into the courtyard of what we may call the station-house.

Blake stated his complaint calmly, relating how he had been set upon by two assassins, and how he had slain both.

Also, how he had forced from one, at the point of death, an avowal as to who was his employer.

Don Jose told his tale—How he had been suddenly set upon in the streets by this Englishman, whom he did not know and thought must be mad.

“*Señor*,” said the *alcalde* to Blake, “the court opens at twelve o'clock to-morrow. You can, if you please, attend, and prefer your charge against his lordship.”

And so the affair ended, by no means to the satisfaction of Edward Blake, who had a foreboding that he would get scant satisfaction from Spanish justice.

As for Don Jose, he bowed slightly to the official, and stalked haughtily away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RESULT OF THE COURT-MARTIAL.

The following day was an eventful one to Ned Blake. In one respect it sealed his doom.

At eight bells he was called aft to the cabin, and there the sentence of the court-martial, having been approved of, was read to him.

It was as he had felt assured all along. He was sentenced to be dismissed Her Majesty's service, and to forfeit all claim to pension or prize-money. The cashiered officer bowed in utter silence, and with a white face and sinking heart descended to his berth to take off the uniform he had

no longer a right to wear ; to pack up his traps and make arrangements for leaving the ship for ever. He felt utterly crushed now that the blow had fallen, although he had expected it, and was alike heedless of the pitying glances bestowed on him by some, and the look of malignant triumph with which First Lieutenant Walker favoured him as he passed him on his way to his cabin. Even Jack O'Brien, the cheery, hopeful, honest-hearted Irishman, his true friend, was unable for some time to arouse him from the sort of despairing lethargy into which he had sunk. Presently, however, a reaction set in, and two or three little circumstances contributed to raise his spirits.

Sailors are proverbially superstitious, and have belief in omens.

At the very moment he and Jack O'Brien went over the gangway into the boat which was to take them ashore—for Jack insisted on accompanying his friend to the court to bear witness in his favour, if possible, against the Spanish noble—an accident happened to the first lieutenant.

"Good luck to you, Lieutenant Blake," said a warm-hearted sailor, putting his head through one of the bow ports as the boat shot by. "There's been a sign for you. You'll have good luck yet. The first lieutenant, bad luck to *him* wherever he goes, has just fallen down to the orlop deck and smashed his face so that his own mother wouldn't know him."

Ned Blake smiled, more with pleasure at this evidence of sympathy on behalf of the seaman than any malicious pleasure at the accident to his enemy.

This was omen No. 1. Omen No. 2 was of quite a different nature.

For two days there had hovered about the rigging of the vessel a strange bird—a dove—evidently an escaped pet, probably of some fair lady who was at that moment mourning its loss. The endeavours to capture it had been vain, and no one was cruel enough to think of shooting it.

As the boat carrying Edward Blake and all his property ashore left the ship, the bird took wing from the royal yard where it had perched, soared a'oft, and then descending in graceful curves, circled about the boat, and so accompanied

her to the shore. The men rowing, heedless of the midshipman in charge, gave a "hurrah!" and in a few seconds a ringing cheer from the ship told that the incident had been noticed, and that the men sympathised with the disgraced officer.

"There, my boy, cheer up," said Jack O'Brien, clapping him on the back, "cheer up, cheer up. Your star will be shortly in the ascendant. Even the birds of the air prophesy good luck to you."

Now, to hard-headed, matter-of-fact people, it may seem absurd and childish, but Ned Blake felt his spirits wonderfully affected by these two trifling incidents, especially the last.

"All's well that ends well."

"Ned, my boy," said Jack O'Brien, "who knows but that this may not prove a fortunate thing for you in the long run? Who can tell—it may lead to success, fame, wealth?"

"It shall," cried Edward Blake, as he leaped ashore. "I have been dismissed with disgrace from the service of Her Majesty of Great Britain; I will carve out my own future with sword, heart, and brain, and the day will come when all the world shall own the foul injustice done to Edward Blake."

* * * * *

The investigation before the Spanish authorities was conducted with the greatest apparent fairness.

The British consul was present, as was an English attorney, to watch over the interests of a British subject.

In accordance with Spanish custom, the bodies of the two dead bravoes, which had been sought for and found, were brought into court, and presented a ghastly spectacle.

Edward Blake told his tale, and the two corpses confirmed it, as also did the examination of the surgeon, who reported that one of the dead men had slight wounds on the throat, as though of knife-pricks, which tallied with the account of the prisoner as to how he obtained the name of the instigator of the bravoes.

Don Jose, when called upon, simply denied all knowledge of the matter, and solemnly swore, standing by the two dead

bodics, that he had never seen them in his life to the best of his belief.

The court took some time to deliberate, and the following decision was then announced—

“That the Englishman had been attacked, as he stated, by two villains, who were, however, merely murderous robbers.

“That one of them, either for malice or in the last delirium of death, had accused Don Jose de Malatesta of having hired him and his comrade to commit murder.

“And finally, that the charge against Don Jose was utterly false and without a shadow of foundation.”

The Spaniards in court clapped their hands, and in other ways manifested their approval of the result.

Edward Blake, however, was by no means satisfied. The matter was ended so far as Spanish justice was concerned, but he resolved it should not rest there.

Contriving to get close to the don ere he left the court, he tapped him on the shoulder.

“Don Jose de Malatesta, you have failed in your attempt to have me assassinated, and I have failed in having you punished for your cowardly crime. When next we meet, I shall win, and you will bite the dust !”

Don Jose only replied with a sarcastic laugh, and then laughtily turned his back on the young Englishman, as though he thought him unworthy of further parley.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SENORITA DECLINES TO SEE EDWARD BLAKE.

BLAKE and O'Brien finding themselves baffled in obtaining satisfaction, resolved to frustrate the contemplated abduction of the senorita.

While on this topic, Blake's attention was attracted by the peculiar appearance of a vessel in the bay

On inquiry, it proved to be the *Vendetta*. He recollects the name instantly. O'Brien and he resolved to proceed at once to the Villa Castelmarina, to warn the marquis.

To reach there the sooner they hired horses, paying extra price for ones in good condition.

Scarcely had our friends galloped off, when several craft might have been seen approaching the steam yacht—a light boat swiftly propelled by half a dozen oarsmen ; several other, but heavier and more clumsy, row boats ; and lastly, a barge or lighter, which, though she had her sail set, was towed by two boats in order to increase her speed.

They were evidently in a great hurry to get alongside the steamer.

In the course of half an hour all these craft reached her, and a few minutes afterwards the light, swift boat, rowed by men, left her gangway, and was steered for the shore, making as nearly as possible straight for a little pleasure-house at the water's edge.

Had Blake seen them he would have recognised an old acquaintance in the stern sheets, and also would have noticed that the crew of the boat were all negroes—powerful fellows, but hideously ugly.

When within a hundred yards or so from the shore, he in command bade them cease rowing, and then lighting a cigarette, he lazily reclined in the stern of the boat, allowing her to drift slowly up the bay with the tide.

Occasionally he gave an order for a few strokes to be made by a couple of the negroes, and so arranged that the boat, as she floated up the bay, also gradually but surely approached the shore.

We will now leave her and follow the fortunes of our friends, Blake and O'Brien, who are bound in hot haste in the same direction as the boat.

Our excitable hero, it may be believed, did not suffer the grass to grow beneath his horses' feet, and when they drew rein at the gate of the Marquis d'Almaviras' country house, both steeds were in a perfect lather of foam.

Blake struck violently with his whip at the high wooden gate, and when the fat, lazy, and pompous porter appeared, cried imperiously—

“The Marquis d'Almaviras—I must see him at once.”

“Impossible, senor.”

“I tell you, I *must* see him. It is a matter of life and death, aye, of greater import perchance than life and death—of honour and dishonour to him and his.”

He spoke so excitedly, and looked so strange and threatening, that the gate porter felt quite alarmed, and was exceedingly civil.

"But his lordship is not within, senor: so it is impossible you can see him."

"The devil! Where then is he?"

"He was here only an hour ago, senor. I think he has gone further up the road, to a farm—La Esmeralda is the name of it—about two miles from this."

"The senorita then, his daughter—she is in."

"She is in, senor, but it is impossible you should see her."

"But I *must* see her; and I *will* see her. Here, wait a minute."

He took out his pocket-book, and wrote on the back of one of his cards—

"SEÑORITA,—I wish to see you, and that instantly, if possible, on a matter of great importance.

"Yours obediently,
"EDWARD BLAKE."

"Take her this," he said, handing it to the porter.

"I will have it forwarded to her presently, senor," replied the old man calmly.

"Ten thousand devils! send it up at once, I tell you," roared Blake.

"No, senor—not for ten million devils," said the old man calmly; for he had now recovered his equanimity, a little disturbed at first by the violent language and excited demeanour of the visitors.

"You won't—why not? I ask you. Must I dismount and strangle you?"

"You ask me, why not? I will tell you," he replied. "Her ladyship has just ordered her bath, and cannot be disturbed for at least an hour."

"Give it to her as soon as you can, then!" cried Blake. "Come on, Jack, let's be on the move again."

"Where to now?" asked O'Brien.

"To this farm, La Esmeralda, if we can find it. I would quite as soon see the marquis as the girl, in the first instance."

The next moment the two companions were clattering down the road at full gallop.

The porter formed just the same opinion as did the host of the inn—that one of them at least was stark mad.

Meanwhile, Blake and O'Brien discovered, in the first place, that two miles Spanish was a very different thing from the same distance English, and, moreover, after thoroughly losing themselves without finding the slightest trace of the place they sought, were forced to retrace their steps, and, in the course of about a couple of hours, again drew up at the gate of the villa with thoroughly jaded horses, themselves almost as much fatigued.

Excitemcnt kept Blake up, while O'Brien, staunch to the back-bone, would not give in before his friend.

He had embarked in the adventure with him, and determined to see him through it.

"Now, then, old devilskin," cried Ned Blake, jumping from his horse, "show me to the senorita; she has left her bath long before this, I will warrant."

"Senor, here is a note for you, from her ladyship," was the reply.

Blake took the dainty little document, looked at the address, and tore it open.

Thus it ran—

"*SEÑOR*,—I am directed by my friend to say (she not writing English fluently) that she declines to have any further communication with you in any shape; in fact, declines your acquaintance altogether, and desires that you will never again address her either verbally; or in writing.

"*ETHELINDA VERINDER.*

"*GIULIA DE CORDOVA D'ALMAVIRAS.*

"To *LIEUTENANT BLAKE, H.M.S. ——.*"

Blake glared at this laconic epistle, and grew red in the face from rage.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him.

"Where is the senorita?" he asked of the porter in the house.

For a wonder the old man answered, and truly—

"She was in the pleasure gardens with the other lady when your card was delivered to her."

"Humph!"

Blake said nothing, and the pair rode slowly away from the gate.

"I mean to see that girl and warn her of her danger, n spite of herself. I have set my mind on it, and I will do it," said Blake.

To O'Brien's question as to how he meant to effect his purpose, he said—

"They are at this time in the garden, you see, Jack, and will very likely stroll about there for a couple of hours this beautiful afternoon. Well, we can't get at the garden by land through the house, but there's no reason we should not by water."

"Swim our horses up, I suppose, eh?" remarked O'Brien, satirically.

"Nothing of the sort. Don't be a fool. We'll get a boat."

"Will we? I'd like to know where?"

"That's soon settled. About a mile up the road I noticed a house or hut, close to the edge of the bay."

"Well, we can't go there in a house or a hut?"

"Just wait. Where there's a hut close to the water, the chances are it's a fisherman's, or some one who gets his living in some such way."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see, he wil' have a boat. All we have to do, is to fasten up our horses, tell him to feed them, take the boat, and quietly row to the end of the garden of the Villa Castelmarina, then letting the boat glide up in the shade of the trees, effect a landing, and gain our object."

"A very pretty little plan indeed, but open to a few objections. In the first place, if this fisherman, or whatever he is, won't let us have the boat?"

"Offer him money. If that won't do, knock him on the head, give him nothing, and take the boat by force," replied Blake, promptly.

"Well, you are a cool fellow, certainly, and a most confoundedly obstinate one. I suppose you must have your way."

And the result was that Blake did have his way; and shortly after, things having turned out as he had guessed, the pair of them were paddling gently along the shore towards the villa.

Various projections, points, and a luxurious growth of trees,

prevented their boat being seen by another, with six black oarsmen and a man in the stern-sheets.

And for the same reason they did not see this boat which was slowly coming in the same direction.

Both were approaching the end of the garden of the Villa Castelmarina ; that carrying Blake and O'Brien most rapidly, for the commander of the other boat was content to let her drift, with an occasional dip or two of the oars.

CHAPTER XX.

EDWARD BLAKE MANAGES AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SEÑORITA.

BLAKE plied the oars of the boat—a small and easily managed one, while O'Brien steered under his directions.

The tide being with them also, they approached the grounds of the marquis pretty rapidly.

He took the boat close in shore, and when within fifty yards of the end of the garden ceased rowing, and allowed her to drift close under the shade of the trees and luxuriant vegetation.

Noiselessly he guided her to a quiet nook, a sort of little creek, where he might easily effect a landing.

As soon as she touched the shore, he sprang out and proceeded to make her fast to the root of a tree.

He was so occupied in this that he did not hear the rustle of dresses or light footsteps only a few feet away.

"Come on, Jack," he said, "get ashore, you may as well see the fun."

O'Brien was not very quick in landing, as he managed to stumble over an oar.

"What a devil of a row you make, Jack, to be sure."

"Hallo!" cried O'Brien, suddenly starting back just as he was about to leap ashore, and gazing in astonishment at some object behind Blake.

"Why, what the devil's the matter, man?" cried the latter.

"Look behind you."

There was an open space of turf from where the prow of the boat touched land, for some three or four yards, where there were some shrubs artificially planted, which hid all beyond.

When Blake turned round, he saw what startled him as it did O'Brien, though it was the very object he sought. No one else than Giulia d'Almaviras herself.

Her friend Ethelinda had just pushed through the bushes and joined her, as Ned Blake turned round and encountered their indignant looks.

As for Giulia, she was pale as death, and speechless with anger at this daring intrusion of the Englishmen. She absolutely trembled with passion, and Ethel Verinder, noting how her eyes flamed and her bosom heaved with rage, sought to calm her.

"Perhaps, dear Giulia, it is a mistake on the part of these two young men."

She said not a word, but stood looking at Blake (who now felt very foolish), as though she would like to scorch him up or slay him with that glance.

"Senorita," he said in a faltering voice, "you will pardon my seeking this means of an interview."

She said never a word, but stood looking at him just in the same way, waiting for him to go on.

"Senorita, I must speak with you on matters of importance."

"Leave this place instantly," she cried, stamping her foot on the ground—"leave it, I say, both of you, or I will call my father's servants, and have you scourged with whips. English gentlemen, forsooth! Gentlemen do not insult ladies, and then intrude their hateful presence. Begone, I say, *men without either shame or honour*."

Blake turned white at this deadly insult. O'Brien did not understand Spanish, but he knew enough to be quite aware of what the beautiful vixen had called them.

"Come, Blake; after that insult we cannot stay. If she were on the brink of a precipice, and I could save her, I would not."

Ned Blake said never another word, but violently cast off the painter, got into the boat, and shoved her off.

"Senorita," he said, his face pale as death, his eyes now in turn flashing fire, "remember my words. You will bitterly regret this—most bitterly—and that ere long."

"Ha! ha! ha!" scornfully laughed the beauty; "he

threatens ! brave man ! Come, Ethel, let us leave those two fellows to their dirty boat. I am tired of seeing them."

Then she strolled away, arm-in-arm with her friend.

Edward Blake sat himself down to the oars, and rowed furiously, viciously, for some ten minutes without any object, except to get away from the spot.

"I say, don't you think it would be more sensible to have the sail up ?" suggested O'Brien. "If we stand well out into the bay, for a mile or thereabouts, we can fetch back to the fisherman's hut in one tack."

His advice was taken, and, in half an hour's time, the pair of them were again ashore, seeing to their tired horses—which they found so completely knocked up that at least a couple of hours' rest was necessary before they could mount them again. Neither had noticed the boat rowed by six negroes, and with them a man in the stern-sheets, which, always keeping close in shore, was now in turn approaching the grounds of the marquis's villa.

"Well, old boy," said O'Brien, "we've made a pretty mess of it. What next ?"

"I think I shall give her up."

"That's right, give her up. She's a vixen and no mistake—as handsome and as fierce as a tigress."

"Yes," muttered Blake. "I think I will leave her to her fate now ; but I'll think of it."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ABDUCTION.

BACKWARDS and forwards paced Giulia and Ethel from a spot near the house almost down to the water's edge.

They had no suspicion of a boat quietly and cautiously brought alongside the shore in a secluded spot, when they were at the end of the garden farthest from the sea.

They knew nothing of six negroes, directed by another man, almost a negro in look, a very demon in crime, creeping and crouching among the bushes.

Of all this they were in happy ignorance.

"Shall we go in ?" asked Ethel, anxiously, for, to tell the truth, she was getting tired.

"Quarter of an hour more, Ethel dear : the fresh air seems to do me good—the sun has scarcely set yet."

Once more they turned and walked down to the end of the garden. It was fully three hundred yards in length, so a slight noise at one end would not be heard at the other.

It was not straight, and besides, there were numbers of trees and shrubs, so that it was impossible to see from the upper end one half way down.

Just as the two young ladies reached the little pleasure house looking out on the calm bay, where they had spent so many happy hours—a low whistle was heard.

So low was it as scarcely to attract the attention of either.

An instant afterwards there was a crashing of shrubs and foliage, and the tramp of heavy feet.

Giulia had but just time to give vent to a faint shriek when she found herself surrounded by a number of gigantic negroes.

In a second, a cloth or rug was thrown over her head, and she felt herself forcibly held in a grasp of iron.

She could neither struggle nor cry out.

Meanwhile, Ethel Verinda had been served the same way, and then both were dragged through the bushes towards the boat.

Arrived there, he who seemed leader of the party said—

"Get ready to uncover the face of the fair girl. I don't want her, so I'll just take the liberty of gagging her and leaving her."

Black Bosco, for the reader has of course discovered it was he, now pulled out a murderous-looking knife.

"Now, young woman," he said, addressing Ethel, "your face is going to be uncovered that I may gag you—keep quiet, and no further harm shall happen to you. But if you open your lips to scream, this knife in your throat shall stop the noise—I swear it, by heaven."

Ethel was a brave girl, but she would have been more than mortal if, in face of this threat, and seeing the terrible knife, she had dared to scream.

Certain it is, that Bosco would have kept his word, and murdered her instantly.

Then the body would have been placed in the boat, a

weight attached to it, and sunk in the sea, which would probably for ever have hidden all traces of the crime.

Ethel was gagged and bound to a tree.

Of course she would soon be found when they were missed, and search made for them ; but by that time the villains would have time to escape.

As for Giulia d'Almaviras, already weakened by excitement, she fainted clean away, and they had no trouble in getting her into the boat.

"Now, then, my lads, shove off, and pull altogether ; you've earned twenty dollars a-piece and the privilege of getting drunk once without being flogged, by this evening's work."

The negroes grinned, and in five minutes after the low whistle sounded the boat was swiftly shooting over the placid water of Havannah Bay, towards the vessel we have before noticed—Don Jose's yacht, the *Vendetta*.

On its way, the boat passed within a hundred yards of that containing O'Brien and Blake.

Little did the latter imagine what inanimate object it was that lay in the stern-sheets, covered with a rug and tarpaulin.

His words of warning, which she took as a threat, had indeed rapidly come to pass.

She had now ample reason to regret bitterly not deigning to hear what he had to say.

In less than half an hour from the time the whistle sounded, Giulia was a helpless captive on board the *Vendetta*.

And one hour and a half after sunset, while yet a little twilight lingered, the elegant vessel steamed out to sea, having on board the handsomest girl and richest heiress in Cuba.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SENORITA ON BOARD THE VENDETTA.

GIULIA D'ALMAVIRAS, whom Blake had tried so hard to warn and save from the fate which befel her, awakened from her swoon to a sense of her situation.

She found herself in a luxuriously appointed saloon, and a glance round told her that it was the cabin of a vessel.

The sun had set about an hour, but, by the light of an oil-lamp swinging over head, she was able to examine the place to which she had been brought.

The predominant feeling in her breast was, as may naturally be supposed, alarm at her position.

The rough handling she had received, the sudden shock, all combined to prostrate her energies and render her unfit for calm thought.

One idea only possessed her mind. From the first moment when she had been attacked and seized, the conviction flashed itself on her soul that this outrage was the work of the insolent Englishman, Blake.

For, had he not threatened her only a short time before ?

After awhile anger and indignation arose in her breast, and she became less under the dominion of terror.

She adjusted her dress—sadly disarranged by the rough usage to which she had been subjected—and, standing before a large mirror, surveyed herself therein.

Suddenly there flashed out from some hiding-place—belt or bosom—a bright steel blade, with ivory handle.

“ Ah ! ha ! ” she said to herself, her native courage gleaming from her eyes, “ at least, I am not wholly defenceless. With this little weapon, toy-like as it seems, I may take the life of a strong man ; or, if need be, it shall find a sheath in my own breast.”

She stood before the mirror, looking at once terrible and lovely. Now brandishing the blue, bright blade, she seemed to strike a blow at an imaginary foe.

Now turning the point to her own bosom, she made as though she would plunge it in, and so end her troubles and sorrows.

So occupied was she in this rehearsal of the tragedy she thought it likely she might enact, that she did not hear a door slide open, nor the footsteps of a man who advanced to her.

The whole floor of the cabin was covered with costly skins in place of carpet, and across these it was possible to walk very quietly.

She saw his figure in the glass as he stealthily crept up to her, probably with the intention of possessing himself of

the deadly little weapon which she wielded so gracefully, and yet, withal, in a manner which seemed to bespeak a stern resolve and deadly intent.

With a slight scream she started on one side and faced the man—no other than Black Bosco.

"Stand off," she cried, impetuously. "Stand off, I say, or I will plunge this knife in your body. Who are you? What are you? And what is the meaning of this outrage? Restore me to my father or dread his vengeance, for the Marquis d'Almaviras is one who will take terrible vengeance for this night's work."

"I don't doubt it for a moment, señorita," said Black Bosco, coolly. "It shall be my most particular care to keep out of his lordship's way now and for ever after."

"Who are you, and what is the meaning of this? What vessel is this?"

"Put up that plaything and I will answer you—so much as I think fit," he said quietly.

She replaced the dagger in its little sheath—so, however, that she could lay her hand on it in an instant, and said—

"Well, sir, whoever you are, perhaps you will explain the meaning of this villainous proceeding? What vessel is this?"

"It is mine."

"And why have you forcibly carried me on board this vessel of yours?"

Bosco answered coolly—

"I am to be well paid for so doing."

"Ah! that rascally Englishman, lieutenant of the British man-of-war—, Senor Blake. It is he who has hired you to commit this outrage."

Bosco looked at first puzzled, and then a gleam of intelligence beamed on his swarthy face.

He resolved to encourage her in her error.

He had no definite reason for so acting, but merely a vague idea that it might be best to mislead her.

"Ha! you do not answer. It is as I thought. Oh! the wretch! but he shall pay dearly for this—aye, pay for it with his life—his life, I say!" she cried, stamping her foot, as she worked herself up into a passion. "Go to your base, cowardly employer, sir, and tell him that his life shall pay

the penalty of this outrage ; that I, Giulia d'Almaviras, have said so. Go, sir, this instant, and take my message."

"By St. Jago de Cuba!" muttered Bosco, "she gives her orders as though she were queen in command, in place of a prisoner."

Then aloud—

"The Senor Blake is not on board the vessel, senorita."

"Not on board? Where, then, is he?"

Black Bosco merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I will be back shortly," he added, as he heard the sound of a shrill whistle on deck. "I am wanted."

He left the cabin, carefully closing the door behind him, and of course fastening it securely.

Giulia, now relieved from fear of immediate danger, proceeded to inspect her prison.

After a minute examination, by which she thoroughly satisfied herself of the impossibility of escape without assistance, she bethought herself how she should act.

"He said that he was to be liberally paid for this deed ; money, then, is his object. I will endeavour to bribe him. I know my father is very rich, and my jewels alone would be a large fortune to this fellow. If he is avaricious, and not too distrustful, I think I can gain him to my views. Threats of a terrible vengeance, and promise of a large reward combined, may have sufficient influence. We shall see !"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SENORITA ATTEMPTS TO BRIBE BOSCO.

BLACK Bosco was absent from the cabin more than an hour, having seen the vessel well out to sea before he again visited his prisoner.

She at once went to the point, and, whatever might be her real feelings, carefully suppressed all show of fear.

"Now, senor capitano," she said, "I wish you to listen to me."

Bosco nodded in reply.

"You know that the penalty for this outrage on the daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras must, to a certainty, be your death, when you are brought to justice ?"

"I don't suppose I should have much mercy shown me," replied Bosco, "but you forget one thing, young lady—I don't mean to be caught—I mean to give Havannah a pretty wide berth for the future."

"That will not avail you; my father has influence with the government, and he will cause the whole globe to be scoured to regain his daughter, and visit with a terrible vengeance those who have wronged her."

"Yes, I know all about that," said Bosco, gloomily, "I took it all into account when I decided on the job. It's done now, and I mean to stand by it."

"What price are you to receive from your villainous employer?"

"This ship, all found in stores and arms, and money enough to take her for at least one cruise."

"My jewels alone are worth more than two such ships. Now listen to me; my father, the marquis, is immensely rich, in his name I promise you a better and more valuable vessel than this, and thrice her value in money—in gold doubloons. What say you?"

Black Bosco grinned and shook his head.

"Money and ship would be little use to me as I hung by the neck, or after my carcase had been riddled with bullets."

"I will give you an undertaking in writing that you shall have a free pardon, that no harm whatever shall befall you. This I will give you and sign it with my own name, and you know right well that the word of a d'Almaviras once pledged is sacred. Were you the greatest scoundrel on earth, and no matter what crime you might have committed, a promise signed by me would be held as sacred by my father as a command from heaven."

"Come, senor capitano, your course is clear—on the one hand fortune and free pardon, on the other a terrible vengeance one day or other."

After deliberate thought, he shook his head and replied sullenly—

"What you promise is impossible; I have taken the affair in hand and must go through with it."

Giulia, who had thoroughly believed that she could win

over this hired ruffian by her promises, now felt her heart sink within her.

She knew not the reasons which induced, almost compelled, him to refuse her most tempting offers, so was powerless to do more when he again met her with a flat refusal.

"No, senorita, it cannot be. So long as you keep quiet you shall not be molested by me, and can have what you want to eat and drink. But what I've undertaken to do, I will do."

"And what have you undertaken to do? Where are you going to take me?"

To this he would make no answer, but went on deck sullen and gloomy, leaving the unhappy girl in a state bordering on despair.

That night she saw him no more.

As for Bosco, her dazzling promises had wrought an effect in his avaricious mind she did not dream of.

It set him thinking.

Why should he not outwit Don Jose, and keeping the heiress to himself, extort a prodigious ransom from her father?

The more he thought of it the more it grew upon him, and at last it assumed a definite shape.

Don Jose was a dangerous man to deal with, and if anything went wrong would at once discover him, and leave all to fall on him.

He might get fabulous sums from the marquis without putting himself either in his power or that of Don Jose.

Feeling the want of a confidant he enlightened his mate Pedro as to his plans.

That worthy's eyes gleamed at the mention of the great sums the slave-captain talked of.

"By all the saints, captain," he cried, "you must be indeed a dolt if you part with this golden bird in the cabin; she is worth ten times what Don Jose offers."

"I think so too; but how to pluck her of her golden feathers without putting my own neck in danger? We must think on a plan, Pedro—hit upon a scheme."

They walked the deck together for hours, these two villains, the chief one of whom was now earnestly intent on the best means of betraying and outwitting his employer.

"Buh ! the fool," said Bosco ; "to think that I should be satisfied with a ship and a few doublons for such a prize as the *senorita*, and risking my neck, too, as I have been fool enough to do before !"

After much talk the two worthies—captain and mate—at last settled on a plan, and arranged all the details to their entire satisfaction.

"And now then for Matanzas !" said Black Bosco ; "we will run in, get the news, and then be off to the Caribbean Sea."

"Why go into Matanzas at all—is it safe ?"

"Quite safe. No one could possibly know whither the *Vendetta* was bound, though some might have seen her sail out of Havannah Bay last evening. I want to hear what news from Don Jose ; whether the sailing of the *Vendetta* has aroused suspicion ; if there is any idea as to what has become of the abducted heiress. If there is anything to communicate, he will dispatch a mounted courier across country from Havannah to Matanzas. That was arranged between us."

So, shortly before noon, the *Vendetta* was run into Matanzas harbour, but did not come to an anchor.

No boats were allowed alongside, the vessel being kept under steam, and caused to go ahead full speed when any endeavoured to approach.

So poor Giulia had no chance of bettering her position in that manner.

Presently, however, a boat flying a yellow flag with a coronet in the centre was seen coming towards the vessel.

This boat Black Bosco allowed to come alongside. Not to the gangway, however, or anywhere near the stern, but close under the bows.

So that it was all in vain that the unfortunate captive cried for help through the little ports in the sleeping-cabin.

A man in the boat handed up a letter, which Bosco took and read.

Ten minutes later the *Vendetta* was again standing out to sea.

Black Bosco paced the deck with the paper crumpled up in his hand, muttering curses the while.

"What course, captain?" asked Pedro, the mate.

"South-east. I must chance it; the fellow can only guess. But what matter?—the ship is armed. Pedro, see to the guns and ammunition. Get all the cannon mounted, and give the men their stations at quarters. It's possible we may have hot work in order to keep this golden bird of ours."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Matter enough. Somehow or another that accursed Englishman has got hold of the fact that the girl is on board this ship. From what this letter says, I guess there's a vessel in pursuit of us."

"Ten thousand demons! What does the letter say?"

Bosco opened it, and showed it to the mate.

"CAPTAIN Bosco,—Beware! An Englishman—you know him—the same one, has got a knowledge of your sailing and of your cargo. He boasts he knows whither you are bound, but that is probably only boast. At all events, keep a look-out, for there will be pursuit. Get rid of the dangerous cargo as soon as possible—the only evidence against you.

MALATESTA."

"What's the dangerous cargo?" asked Pedro.

"Why, the prisoner, of course."

"What does he mean by, 'Get rid of the dangerous cargo at once'? Throw her overboard—eh?"

"No; he doesn't mean that. Besides, she's too valuable. It would indeed be a pity to have to pitch overboard so many thousand doubloons. If we are overhauled by a Spanish man-of-war, Pedro, it must be done, though."

"What! the girl pitched overboard?" cried the less hardened villain, an expression of horror on his face.

"Aye, my lad. If a Spanish war-ship comes up astern, the Senorita Giulia d'Almaviras must be dropped over the bows with a good heavy shot at her feet to steady her."

"What! alive?"

"Why trouble to kill her on board? The salt water and the sharks will soon settle her business."

To hear this ruffian talk of the brutal murder of an innocent girl was enough to make one's blood run cold, and even Pedro shuddered.

"The captain is a terrible man," he said to himself when alone. "Right well have they named him Black Bosco!"

CHAPTER XXIV

BLAKE AND MALATESTA AT THE VILLA CASTELMARINA.

LEAVING the *Vendetta* with the fair prisoner securely confined in the cabin, speeding on her way to the Caribbean Sea, we will return to Havaannah, and our two friends, Blake and O'Brien. They were awakened before the expiration of the two hours they had given themselves for much needed repose by a considerable uproar and noise of voices talking loudly and excitedly.

At a distance, too, they could distinguish the lond clang-ing of a bell, and on starting to their feet soon found that nnusual excitement was afoot.

Some men in the livery of the Marquis d'Almaviras had just run down from the road and were vehemently question-ing the proprietor of the hnt.

Soon they, too, eame in for eager questioning as to whether they had seen anything of a lady being dragged away by ruffians. It was supposed that she had been carried either in a boat or along the water's edge, as no trace of the abductors could be found on the high road.

The daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras had been seized while walking in the garden with a friend and forcibly carried off by a gang of ruffians—negroes.

Her friend, another young lady, had been gagged and bound to a tree, and so completely had the villains succeeded that nothing even was known of the affair for nearly an hour, when, on the young ladies being missed and a search made, one of them had been thus found.

Edward was not in the least surprised.

He smiled, even, and for a time a feeling of triumph arose in his breast, as he thought of the contumely and scorn with which he had been received when he sought to warn her of her impending fate.

But he dismissed this unworthy sentiment, and soon he felt sincerely sorry for the unfortunate girl who had fallen into the hands of such ruffians.

By the aid of the conversation he had overheard, he understood the whole affair, and almost his first thought was

to go down to the water's edge, and look for the yacht, the *Vendetta*.

"We'll go and see the marquis now. At least, I will," said Blake to O'Brien. "It's not more than a mile to the Villa Castelmarina. I'll wager that when I send my card in, with a few lines scribbled thereon, I shall get prompt admittance."

Having ascertained from one of the servants that the marquis was still at the villa giving orders for a search, in a state almost frantic, Blake had the horses saddled, and started on the road, accompanied by O'Brien.

Various little things delayed them, the lameness of one of the horses, the breaking of a girth, and such like little trifles, so that when they arrived once more at the gate of the Villa Castelmarina, it was little more than an hour from midnight, and nearly three hours had elapsed since the abduction.

Just before they arrived at the gate, a carriage drawn by four horses dashed up, and from it there alighted no less a personage than Don Jose de Malatesta.

"Well, he's a cool fellow, certainly," remarked Blake; "come to offer his condolences to the marquis, I suppose. Like his impudence!"

Taking a card, he wrote on the back—

"MY LORD MARQUIS,—I have information as to the abduction of your daughter, and wish to see you on the subject."

This procured him instant admission.

"Come in, Jack," he said; "I've got the trump card in my hand now, and mean to let them know it. I'll see they treat me and my friends with proper respect. Here, one of you fellows," he cried, to a servant he saw, "take our horses to the stable and see them attended to. And here, you," he cried to another, as he entered the villa, "get a flagon of wine; my friend and I are thirsty."

"Well," remarked O'Brien, "you are a cool fish."

"I mean to be, my boy. It's my turn now. The game is in my hands and I mean to play it for my own pleasure and advantage. Come, let us go into this apartment—it looks delightfully cool and pleasant this sultry evening."

So saying, he led the way into a sort of ante-room divided from the hall of the villa by a heavy crimson curtain,

A large window reaching from ceiling to floor opened on to a part of the gardens, and at a short distance a fountain sparkled and glistened in the moonlight, the effect of which was wonderfully cool and refreshing.

The attendant placed the wine on a small table which he wheeled close up to our hero, and then delivered the following message—

"My lord the marquis presents his compliments to you, senor, and is anxious to see you at once."

Ned Blake filled himself a bumper of wine and another for Jack O'Brien.

Having drank these, he made reply—

"My compliments to his lordship the marquis, and say that I have been riding about all day in search of him in the interest of himself and the senorita his daughter. I am now hot, dusty, tired, and hungry, having partaken of next to nothing. I feel that some light refreshment is necessary before I can converse with his lordship on the very important matter which has brought me here."

Two servants appeared, carrying in two trays amply provided with every delicacy possible to be procured on so short a notice.

"Now, then, Jack, fall to; we're in luck. Fortune's wheel has taken a turn in my favour."

Jack O'Brien wanted no second invitation, and the next minute the two friends were hard at work discussing the viands before them.

The two things the Marquis d'Almaviras cared for and cherished above all else in the world were his pride and his beautiful daughter, Giulia.

It may be imagined, then, what a heavy blow this daring abduction was to his lordship. He was doubly wounded, both by grief at the loss of his daughter, of whose fate he was in utter ignorance, and his pride received a terrible shock.

To add to his perplexity, Ethel could give no coherent answer to his vague question. Her mind was sadly shaken by the shock the fright had caused her. So the marquis had to wait to obtain information from some other source.

Don Jose's card lay before him.

"Show Don Jose up," he said to the servant, who was waiting at a respectful distance.

"My dear marquis," he said in tones of deep condolence, "I but just heard of this sad affair, and hastened to see if I could be of any use to you. Have you heard anything of your daughter, or of the villains who abducted her?"

"Not a syllable. All I know is, that she was seized in the garden, and carried off in a boat, but whither, heaven knows."

"Do you think she has been taken on board some vessel in the harbour?"

"I know not what to think. I am distracted," cried the marquis.

"It is possible, probable even, she may have been conveyed on board some ship. Perhaps taken out to sea."

"If so, I have just purchased a vessel which will be sent to sea at once to cruise about in search of the piratical villains."

"The vessel you have just purchased!" cried Don Jose, to whom this was news. "I did not know you had bought one."

"Yes. For certain reasons, which I need not enter on here, I have purchased that clipper-built iron steamer intended as a privateer for the Confederate Government."

"What! the *Avenger*?"

"Yes."

"And is she ready for sea?"

"Quite—guns, provisions, everything. She wants her full crew, but that is not material. By San Jago de Cuba! but if ever she passes into the hands of the Southerners, she'll prove a sharp thorn to the Yankees."

Don Jose merely felt surprise at the news—no alarm. It was merely a singular thing that the marquis should have bought this fine vessel on the very day he had successfully carried off the lovely Giulia and dispatched her to sea in the *Venetta*.

Meanwhile the marquis had grown impatient at the non-appearance of Edward Blake, and sent to inquire.

"Insolent!" he cried, when our friend's cool message was brought back to him. "What do you make o' this?"

And with the words he handed the card to Don Jose.

Malatesta recognized the name instantly, and changed colour.

"What the devil does this mean?" he said, after he had read the brief missive. "What can he know about it?"

"Well, what do you think?" asked d'Almaviras, who had the greatest confidence in the friendship and sympathy of the don.

He knew not what to think.

So he shrugged his shoulders and told what he knew to be a lie.

"Probably he has some hand in it, and has come about the ransom."

"Perhaps so; pray heaven he has, this suspense is terrible. I shall certainly see him. Will you wait and hear what he has to say, Don Jose?"

Now Malatesta, although he wished greatly to know the business on which Edward Blake had come, yet did not wish to be seen by our hero.

"No," he said, carelessly, "I will stroll into the next room and rest on the balcony while you talk to the fellow. If he comes, as I suspect, about the ransom, he will not speak before a witness."

Then Don Jose, saluting the marquis, strolled leisurely towards the heavy curtain which divided this apartment from the next, and raising it, passed in. Instantly, however, he placed himself in the most favourable position for hearing all that passed in the larger room.

This arrangement of curtains and screens in place of doors, common in the houses of the wealthy in hot climates, was most favourable to his purpose.

The next moment Edward Blake entered, and saluting the marquis, said—

"My lord, I am now at your service. Shall we talk?"

"Do you know anything of my daughter's fate?"

"I do."

"Were you concerned in her abduction?"

"I was not."

"You have not, then, come to ask money for your information?"

"Repeat that foul aspersion and I leave you—leave your daughter to her fate. I am an English gentleman, my lord marquis."

His manner impressed the Spaniard, who said, bowing gravely—

"Pardon, 'senor. Proceed ; I am all attention."

CHAPTER XXV

EDWARD BLAKE AND THE MARQUIS D'ALMAVIRAS.

EDWARD BLAKE at once commenced—

"My lord marquis, your daughter, Giulia d'Almaviras, has been kidnapped by a villain for his own vile purposes."

"What purpose ?"

"To force her to marry him, if possible ; and if he should fail in doing so by fair means, to adopt the most infamous expedient."

"What expedient ?"

Blake hesitated, and scarce knew how to put it in words.

"He would, if she refused to be his wife, force her to be his mistress."

"Ten thousand demons !" yelled d'Almaviras, furiously dashing his hand on a small ivory-topped table with such violence as to splinter it to fragments.

"Who dare offer such an indignity to a daughter of the house of d'Almaviras ? Tell me the man's name, and though he had a dozen lives he shall die. His name I say, 'senor, his name !'

And the infuriated Spaniard stamped on the floor and gnashed his teeth with rage.

But Ned Blake calmly shook his head.

"You do not know him," cried the marquis.

"Oh ! yes, I know perfectly well both principal and agent in this villainous business."

Don Jose started and turned pale as he heard this avowal, which had the more effect from being so quietly spoken.

A shuddering conviction shot through his frame that this Englishman spoke truly, and really did know what he said.

As for the marquis, he grew purple with passion, and in

an instant out flashed his sword, for at the moment he was in the uniform of a Spanish general.

" You know and you refuse to tell. My sword shall force the name from you. Your life or the names of the villains who have carried off my daughter. And more than that, I will have full particulars. Come, sir, speak, or I will kill you."

The sword of the enraged nobleman flashed about in a most unpleasant manner to Edward Blake, who, stepping back quietly, threw off his cloak, and drawing his own sword, stood on the defensive.

" At your service, marquis," he said, with quiet irony. " We will fight if you insist, unless indeed your prefer to murder me in cold blood. But allow me to call your attention to the result—if I kill you, that will not get back your daughter. She will then lose her father, the one man in the world most anxious to protect her. If you kill me, what I know will die with me, and then there will be none alive except the villains who planned and executed this outrage who can give you any information as to your daughter's fate. Nevertheless, marquis, if you insist on fighting, I am willing to accommodate you. I killed two hired bravoes last night, to-night, perhaps, I may have the honour of running a Spanish nobleman through the body."

Don Jose, behind the curtain in the next room, was all the while muttering curses.

The coolness and quiet bravado of the Englishman both incensed and disquieted him.

" He must know something," he muttered ; " he feels pretty sure of his position, or he could not talk and act so."

As for d'Almaviras, notwithstanding his rage, he saw the force of what the Englishman had said.

Besides, too, he beheld an athletic, stalwart young man before him, with fearless eye, bold front, and sword as long and keen as his own. He lowered the point of his sword.

" Well, senor, we will not fight. But why will you not tell me who are the villains who carried off my daughter—if, indeed, you know, and this is not an idle boast on your part?"

" It would be both a foolish and unprofitable boast," he replied ; " now I will tell you why I refuse to say all I know.

But before I do so, let me say this. I will do all in my power to restore to you your daughter in my own way—on my own terms."

"Ah, it is gold, then, you require?"

"My lord marquis, I told you before I am an English gentleman. Repeat that slander again, hint that I wish to extort money, and I leave your daughter to her fate."

The marquis, whose excitement had now calmed down, seemed to resign himself to the situation.

"Well, Senor Blake, let it be as you say. But before I hear what you have to say, tell me who and what you are."

"An English gentleman, lately an officer on board H.M.S. ——."

"Ah!"

"I had the honour of making the acquaintance of your daughter."

"*Carrambo!*" cried d'Almaviras, in the utmost astonishment, for he had never seen or heard of Edward Blake, although on the previous night the young man had been present at the *fête*.

"I had the honour of doing her a trifling service."

"The devil!"

"Exactly so. The young lady did not evince much gratitude. She gave me evil for good, and now I am about to give good for evil."

"You speak in riddles, senor," said the marquis haughtily.

"I will now explain. You have staying here a young lady, Ethelinda Verinder; she also is slightly acquainted with me; I should wish her to be present and hear what I have to state."

"Mystery on mystery," said the marquis, but, nevertheless, he sent instantly for the young lady.

She bowed coldly to Edward Blake, as she entered the room.

"I asked his lordship to send for you, Miss Verinder, because I am in possession of important information concerning the abduction of the Senorita Giulia. When I tell you that I know both who planned and who executed the outrage, you will understand that what I have to say is indeed important."

Ethel bowed, but said not a word.

"As you can corroborate a part of what I have to say, I wish you to hear, and decide as to whether I speak truly on all points. Allow me to conduct you to a seat."

Ethelinda bowed, but declining his assistance, seated herself on an ottoman.

The Marquis d'Almaviras seated himself beside her, while Edward Blake, preferring to stand before them, commenced his narration.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EDWARD BLAKE'S NARRATIVE.

"I WILL first proceed to give you my reason for refusing to state the name of the wrong-doers.

"In the first place, it would not aid you in recovering your daughter, and in the second, I should probably be disbelieved."

"Why should you think so?" asked the marquis.

"Because I have already had experience."

Then he proceeded to relate his adventure of the previous night, his killing the bravoes, and forcing from one the name of his principal.

Don Jose listened in breathless suspense, to hear whether the Englishman would again accuse him.

But Blake refrained, and refused to say who he believed was his would-be assassin at second hand.

Ethel guessed, however, and listened with increased interest.

Presently he went on to say that the whole plot had come to his knowledge.

The plan to carry the young lady off, how she was to be taken on board ship, and whether she should then be conveyed.

"I know the very place, a desolate island in the ocean."

Don Jose, who was standing close to the curtain, started so violently at hearing this as to cause it to wave to and fro.

"Perdition!" he muttered: "he must know something—but how much—what does he know?—that is the question. And how could he have gained this knowledge? Can Bosco have betrayed me? Scarcely, for his own sake."

Don Jose was deadly pale now, and the perspiration stood

ont on his forehead in beads.

He began to appreciate the gravity of the situation, to realize the fact that he had a deadly and dangerous enemy in the Englishman.

Blake saw the curtain shake ; at once it occurred to him that there was an eaves-dropper.

He remembered that Don Jose de Malatesta had arrived just before him, and resolved to be on his guard.

" You will excuse me, my lord," he said, " but is there anyone in the adjoining apartment ? I thought I saw the curtain shake."

" No one, no one ; " he had really forgotten all about Don Jose for the moment.

Blake still looked suspicious.

" And you say you know where these villains have carried my daughter, and will seek her out, and restore her to me, or endeavour to do so ? "

" I will, on conditions."

" What conditions."

" That you will aid me in bringing to an account the villain who designed and carried out this outrage."

" Only too gladly," said the marquis savagely. " I wish I had my sword at his throat now."

" That you will never rest until you have brought about the death of this man—on the scaffold, if possible, when I shall have revealed to you his name. You will believe me, I suppose, when I restore to you your daughter ? "

" I will, and will do all you say so far, on my honour."

" Now the other conditions."

Blake again glanced uneasily at the curtain. Once more he had seen it shake in a manner which made him think it was something more than the wind.

Ethelinda Verinder, who had listened as one entranced to all the young man had said, and now thoroughly believed him, rose.

" I will see if there is any one in the next room," she said.

But, when she drew aside the curtain, there was no one, although she felt nearly sure she had heard the sounds of rapidly-retreating footsteps.

Edward Blake also had heard the same sounds.

"I think it would be as well, Miss Verinder," he said in English, "if you were to loop the curtains back. I do not wish what I have to say to be overheard."

And so Don José de Malatesta, who had beat a hasty retreat out on to the balcony, lost the remainder of the conversation.

His state of mind may possibly be imagined, but not easily described.

"I will send off at once and warn Bosco that there may be a pursuit," he muttered. "It is best to be on the safe side."

The marquis, after listening to all that Edward Blake had to say, asked the opinion of Ethelinda.

She at once replied—

"I believe every word this gentleman has spoken to be true."

A complete change had occurred now in her feelings towards the young Englishman, whom she could not help believing.

"And you believe you can rescue my daughter unharmed, safe and sound, as when she was carried off?"

"I do, and for this reason—I know that the principal villain, the instigator of the outrage, is himself still in the island. He will not leave probably for some days to go to the place where his agents have taken the girl, lest his doing so should excite suspicion. To denounce him now would do little good. He is crafty enough to take care that I should have no proof of my words. When, however, I have rescued your daughter, and got his agent in my power, then he will be in the toils, indeed—then I will strike, and strike hard."

"What means have you at your command to do what you say? You will want a ship—men—money?"

"I have little enough," replied Blake, simply; "I will give my knowledge and skill to rescue your daughter, and, if need be, risk my life. The rest I must leave to you."

Ethelinda laid her hand on the marquis's arm.

"Trust him," she said simply.

"I will, I will," said d'Almaviras, rising. "Senor Blake, my fortune is at your service to do what you can; restore me my child. I have a fine steam-vessel here in the harbour,

by to-morrow she can be ready for sea. She has guns, ammunition, provisions, coal, everything except a portion of her crew, which you can easily obtain. To-morrow I will give you a letter of unlimited credit on the principal bankers of Havannah, and by the afternoon you can set sail on your cruise to rescue my daughter."

"You have a vessel in the harbour ready for sea!" exclaimed Edward Blake; "this is indeed fortunate."

"Yes, she was intended for a Confederate privateer, but for certain reasons I have bought her. Her name is the *Avenger*—"

"The *Avenger*! a splendid vessel indeed! I am really fortunate. Already I feel assured of success."

"And now for the last condition, señor," said d'Almaviras, gravely; "the one you have kept back to the last."

"It is very simple—very plain; you can grant it or refuse it. All I want is your word of honour—"

"What is it you would ask of me?" said the marquis uneasily, and turning pale.

"The hand of your daughter, Giulia de Cordova d'Almaviras, on my success."

There was a dead silence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DUEL.

THE Marquis d'Almaviras seemed for a time so overwhelmed with astonishment—thunderstruck at Blake's demand, that for a time he was totally unable to make any reply. The blood flew to his face and forehead till his complexion was of a deep purple hue, and he seemed in danger of apoplexy. He tried to speak several times—gasped and sputtered—but something in his throat, rage perhaps, prevented him uttering any articulate sounds. There was wine on a side table, and he felt compelled to swallow a large glass ere he could calm himself sufficiently to reply to the audacious demand of the Englishman.

"Señor," he said, at last, in accents tremulous with rage, "your audacity is astounding. It is an insult—a gross

affront. By St. Jago de Cuba, to think that a nameless adventurer should dare demand of me the hand of my daughter!"

"Nameless adventurer!" cried Blake, hotly, interrupting him; "how dare you say so! Old man, mind what you say. I care nothing for your being a Spanish marquis—you may be for all I know the noblest hidalgo of all Spain—but if you call me a nameless adventurer, I will strike you across the face with the flat of my sword."

D'Almaviras instantly clapped his hand on the hilt of his sword and strode forward, his eyes flashing defiance.

Ethelinda Verinder, however, interposed, and seizing him by the sword-arm, prevented him advancing further towards Ned Blake, who—keeping his eye firmly fixed on him—stood motionless, ready at once to draw and fight.

"My lord—my lord!" urged Ethel, "pray control your anger. Consider poor Giulia, now in the hands of bad men. Surely all our efforts, all our thoughts, should be directed as to how to rescue her, not to brawling among ourselves."

The marquis made a furious effort to disengage himself from the firm, nervous grasp of the Yankee girl, who held on, seeing inevitable bloodshed should they once cross swords in their present mood.

D'Almaviras was mad with rage; and as for Edward Blake, what with excitement, want of sleep, and the wine he had just partaken of pretty freely, and which had an unwonted effect on him, he seemed utterly reckless as to how the affair ended.

A desperate encounter was imminent, as it was certain Ethel could not much longer restrain the infuriated old noble. But in the very nick of time, just as by a rude and violent effort, he had almost shaken himself clear of the lovely embracement, the heavy curtain between this and the adjoining room was drawn aside, and Don Jose de Malatesta appeared.

"Don Jose," cried Ethel, stifling her dislike of the man, "help me to restrain these two gentlemen from fighting—at all events now—I implore of you."

D'Almaviras' attention was drawn to Don Jose, and for the moment he ceased endeavouring to reach Blake.

He had drawn his sword, in spite of the resistance of Miss

Verinder ; and as our friend had done so likewise, they stood within a few paces of each other with bare blades.

Don Jose was the first of the three men to speak.

" Marquis, if you are going to fight I shall be happy to act as your second, and see that no unfair advantage is taken of you."

The threatened encounter suited the plans of Don Jose admirably.

That crafty schemer rapidly turned the affair over in his mind, and at once came to the conclusion that it would be an excellent thing for him if one or *both* of the two combatants were killed.

If the marquis fell he would be free from all dread of his vengeance, should the real facts of the young lady's abduction ever transpire.

If Blake were slain, he would be rid of a personal enemy —a rival whom he bitterly hated, and moreover, he would have nothing to fear from his knowledge of his schemes and plans.

For that he knew something, though he could not tell what, nor how he obtained the information, was a certain fact.

So Don Jose stood looking on with a cruel smile on his dark, handsome face, waiting for the encounter to begin.

" Don Jose, I beg of you to prevent this fight !" cried Ethelinda, her natural, womanly dread of bloodshed overpowering her pride and dislike of the man to whom she appealed.

" By no means, senorita," replied Don Jose ; " I should be very sorry to interfere in an affair of honour between two gentlemen. Doubtless offence has been received on one side at least, which necessitates an appeal to the sword. I will watch over the interests of my good friend, the Marquis d'Almaviras. In the meanwhile, Senorita, I would counsel you to withdraw from this apartment."

His words were polite, but his manner so insolent and sneering as to stir up Ethelinda's anger.

She walked up to him and said—

" Cruel wretch, you would stand by and see the blood of the old man, your lost, and whom you call *your friend*, stain the floor of his own house. Ah !"

He bowed with a mocking smile.

"I must again advise you to withdraw, senorita," he said.

Appearing to take no notice of his words, "Ah! coward!" she cried, "you dare not meet the Englishman, sword in hand, yourself, so are glad to look on while an old, but braver man risks his life. I wonder not now that Giulia so hated and despised you, reptile that you are!"

This touched him to the quick.

At first his dark face flushed, then became of a livid leaden colour.

The shaft had gone home.

He might have retorted, but at that moment the harsh clash of steel drew their attention to the two combatants.

The duel had apparently commenced.

The marquis, impatient of delay, his Spanish blood thoroughly roused, his pride wounded, and altogether infuriate, had suddenly bounded forward, and with a short cry—

"Defend yourself!" had fiercely lunged at Edward Blake, who had but just time to parry the thrust.

Ethelinda gave a little scream as the swords, whisking and clashing together, told that the fight had really commenced.

She pressed both her hands to her eyes to shut out the terrible sight of what she dreaded must happen—one or other of the two falling—run through the body by the cruel steel.

Suddenly there was a pause in the clash of swords—Edward Blake felt pretty confident of victory.

The marquis was a good swordsman, but his arm wanted strength, his frame vigour and agility, though there was no lack of courage in the old noble's breast.

Accordingly, the Englishman suddenly leaped backward some paces and lowered his sword.

"A truce," he cried.

"Ah, you are afraid!" replied the marquis, tauntingly.

"You lie!" replied Blake, with more promptness than courtesy.

A furious oath broke from the marquis, and he prepared to renew the battle.

"I wish to say a few words. I am not afraid of you nor of any Spaniard who ever broke bread," said the Englishman, more quietly, "but I wish to say a few words. When I have spoken you can do your worst, kill me or I will kill you. This young lady will, I doubt not, bear witness that I have acted fairly throughout if you fall, as most likely I shall kill you."

The marquis lowered his sword point, and said, sullenly—

"Speak."

"This is the state of the case, Marquis d'Almaviras. If we renew the fight, and you kill me, your daughter is lost to you for ever, dishonoured, worse than dead. If I kill you she is none the less lost, for it cannot be supposed that I, having slain the father, should further interest myself in the fate of the daughter. In either case your daughter is lost, for *I, and I only, know whither she has been carried, by whose instigation, and for what base purpose.*"

"It's a lie! I won't believe it! I will rescue her! Defend yourself, you who have both insulted me and her."

Blake was deadly pale. He saw that the deed must end seriously. It was impossible to act altogether on the defensive against the marquis, who was an excellent swordsman, firmly bent on running him through the body.

He must either kill or wound him, or be served in like manner himself.

And for this latter he was by no means inclined.

Besides, he was also nearly as much enraged as the marquis at the contumely with which he considered he had been treated.

"So be it, your blood and your daughter's fate be on your own head. Remember, I have warned you. I, and I only, can save your daughter from dishonour."

But the marquis appeared to disregard his words utterly.

The next moment the swords again clashed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STEWARD GONZALVO.

THE feelings of Giulia d'Almaviras when the vessel on board which she was a helpless prisoner steamed out of the harbour of Matanzas and put to sea, were as near despair as it is possible to conceive.

The day passed, and night came—a night which brought to her but little rest, and no sleep, although she found a small cabin elegantly fitted up as a bed-chamber, and evidently intended for her to occupy.

She did not even lie down, much less undress, but reclined on an ottoman, her face ever turned towards the companion-stairs, down which Bosco had come when he visited her, and by which way any one else who entered the cabin must also come.

She did not forget her dagger, that sharp, deadly little blue blade she cherished in her bosom.

The night passed without incident, and shortly after sunrise exhausted nature claimed her sway, and she fell off into a profound sleep.

When she awoke Black Bosco was standing before her, a wicked smile on his dark countenance.

Instantly, and as it were by instinct, she started up, and drew her only weapon—the little dagger.

"Bah!" said Bosco, scornfully, "what nonsense! I have been here these five minutes while you lay asleep. If I had chosen, I could have seized you—had you bound and gagged—done as I was ordered. As for that plaything, you are welcome to keep it. Should it ever be necessary, I shall have no trouble in taking it from you, believe me."

There was such obvious truth in what he said that she could not fail but see it.

Blushing with anger and mortification at discovering how really helpless she was, she replaced the dagger in her bosom.

"Well, senor, for what purpose have you visited me? You have caught me asleep. It shall not happen again."

"It is no matte'," he said ; "as to what I have come for, only to see how you feel disposed for refreshment, food, wine, and so forth ; and also I came in order to look over my charts, and to get up a nautical instrument, all of which I keep in that little cabin forward."

Following his glance she now saw what she had not before noticed—a sliding door opening into a berth or little cabin on the starboard side.

It was open, and by the sunlight which streamed in through the port she saw on a small tray-like table charts, a compass, and other nautical things.

Of this she took no note, and replied to his remark about refreshments—

"I want nothing, senor, but my liberty, to be restored to my father. Do that, and I will keep the promises I made you yesterday."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Impossible," was the brief reply.

She was about again to urge it on him, but he cut her short abruptly, rudely even.

"Young woman, you waste your breath. As to what you say about not wanting anything to eat or drink, I shall send for both, you can then please yourself. Try your skill on Gonzovalo, my steward-boy, perhaps he may listen to your fine promises."

Thercupon, without taking any further notice of her, he went forward to the little cabin just spoken of, and she saw him poring over a chart.

She gave no heed to this whatever at the time.

His words had set her thoughts into a different channel.

"Gonzovalo," she said, to herself, "the steward. At all events, it will be one more human being to speak to, and try to influence. Who knows ?—heaven may soften his heart, and induce him to listen to me, and give me his assistance."

When Bosco had finished his charts he came out from the little cabin, and, after carefully locking it, left her to herself, without deigning another word.

She did not wish to give way to sleep again, so made a hasty toilet, bathing her fevered face and forehead in cold

water, of which she found a supply in the berth evidently intended for her to use as a sleeping-place.

She took some pains to make herself look attractive. In this she had no trouble, as her great beauty was in no wise diminished by the terror and fatigues she had gone through.

"He may be young and impressionable," she said, to herself, "this Gonzalvo—"

She had scarcely finished when she heard the door of the companion-way unlocked, and presently Gonzalvo himself descended into the cabin, carrying a tray, on which were several bottles of wine, fruit, and other eatables of excellent quality.

"This is for your breakfast, *senorita*," the steward said, respectfully; "if there is anything else you would like, please let me know, and you shall have it, if possible."

She did not reply at first, but, intently regarding him, sighed deeply.

She saw a slender, light-coloured young mulatto, apparently not more than nineteen or twenty years of age at the outside.

His features were regular, and decidedly handsome; his hair dark brown, and with but very slight curl. His complexion was not so dark as that of many Spaniards, and he might easily have passed for a white man.

He had been with Bosco since his childhood, and the slave-captain placed the utmost confidence in his fidelity. He looked earnestly at Giulia, who, in reply to his words, only sighed.

She dropped her eyes before his, which—large, dark, and expressive—regarded her with evident admiration.

"Is there anything else I can bring you, *senorita*?" he said again, in a low, soft voice. "In the way of food, I mean—anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing," she said, suddenly lifting her glorious eyes, and flashing their brightness full on his face, "nothing, *senor*, unless you can give me my liberty—restore me to my friends."

"Alas! *senorita*," he said, "I am as powerless as yourself in that respect. There is but one master on board. He orders all—rules all—his will is law."

It was certain, by the looks and manner of the young uatto, that he was deeply impressed with her beauty. his might be used to win him over to assist at, or, at all events, connive at, her escape.

He took his leave, but shortly returned with a large box, which he placed on the deck at her feet.

"For your use, senorita," he said, and with a low bow and languishing look, he again took his departure.

He was evidently smitten.

Giulia felt certain of that, and resolved to make use of the fact at the very earliest opportunity.

"Black Bosco came down into the saloon once shortly after noon, and again two hours later ; on each occasion he took little notice of her, but went at once to the little cabin, and bent over the charts and maps on the table.

Her curiosity was excited.

There was something in that cabin she should like to be acquainted with, she thought to herself.

Bosco always most carefully fastened the door, and even made it doubly secure by means of a padlock.

Walking up and down the saloon as was her wont when Bosco was there (for she could not find patience to sit before him) she passed every now and then the door of this little cabin.

On one occasion Giulia noticed that Bosco was making pencil marks on a chart which he was earnestly studying.

Then it occurred to her he was marking off the course the vessel had traversed.

And perhaps—her heart bounded at the thought—he had also marked out the intended course of the vessel, and the destination to which she was bound.

The more she thought, the more she became impressed with the idea.

Finally an eager desire to enter that cabin to inspect the charts for herself possessed her.

She determined that she would do so ; and then feeling certain, woman like, that she would find there all that she wished, she elaborated a plan for conveying a knowledge of her situation, and of the place to which she was being carried, to friends whom she felt certain were in search and pursuit of her.

She began at once to prepare for the latter part of her plan.
She set to work to discover the secret of the cabin.

Vainly she tried her hand at lock picking, only succeeding in hurting her delicate fingers.

So she resolved to fall back on Gonzalvo, who was now madly enamoured of her.

“At any risk, at any cost, no matter what I promise, what I permit him to hope, I must get admission to that little cabin, and see those charts. I must and I will, and it shall be through Gonzalvo.”

This was her final determination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GONZALVO FALLS IN LOVE.

To all women it comes easier to play a part requiring skill, delicacy, tact, and, I will add, deceit, than it does to man.

So well did Giulia play the part she had decided on, as completely to intoxicate Gonzalvo, giving him reason to think that his passion was not hopeless.

“Ah! señor,” she said, in a plaintive voice, “what a sad fate is mine! Torn away from my friends, carried, I know not whither, by cruel, violent men. If I only knew what fate was destined for me, I might perhaps be happier—more resigned. But I am alone—friendless—with no human being to listen, or give me a kind word, even a kind thought; friendless, in the power of bad men.”

“Say not so, lady,” he cried passionately; “while I have life and strength you are not friendless. Say but the word, and I will lay down my life for you. Give me but a little hope and I am your devoted slave.”

“Ah! señor, you cavaliers can say flattering things to a poor damsel in distress, but when it comes to deeds, that is a different matter.”

“Nay, señorita, say not so: there is nothing I will not do for your sake—no peril I will not risk, no pain I will not suffer, and think myself too well rewarded by a kind glance from our eyes, and being permitted to kiss your hand.”

“Ah, well,” she said sighing, and with a languishing look which sent the blood dancing through his veins, “I

shall perhaps put you to the test before long ; then we shall see what truth there is in all your fine words and protestations."

"Is there anything I can do for you now, senorita ?"

"Yes, restore me to liberty and my friends ; then come and claim your reward."

His eyes sparkled.

"Claim my reward ! Ah ! if I dared say what I should esteem the greatest reward on earth."

"Would you disobey Bla k Bosco ?" she asked suddenly.

He hesitated for half a moment.

"For your sake, senorita, I would. Ah ! if you would but smile on me."

She favoured him with a languishing smile, and a look full of sad tenderness, which almost drove him delirious with joy.

Carried away by his passion, he raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it not once, but again and again.

"Senor," she said, "you forget yourself."

The words were reproving, but the tone was not angry, and that carried some consolation to the young man's heart.

"Ah ! you scorn me, spurn my love," he said in accents of profound melancholy. "Well, it is but right. I ought not to expect otherwise. To be trampled iu the mud beneath your feet, lady, should be reward enough for me."

"Nay, senor, believe me, I have no such wish, no such harsh feeling towards you. But you speak to me of reward, of a smile from me being ample recompense for any service you could render, yet you seem to forget that hitherto it has been only words on your part."

"Senorita, try me," he cried.

"I will," she said, then paused, and remained as if in deep thought for some moments. "I wish to know what is going on on deck. What Bosco is doing and planning. What course the vessel is steering. Whither we are bound to, and any other information you can gather."

His countenance fell.

"I will do all I can, but, alas ! some things you ask are, I fear, impossible. I know not whither the vessel is bound. That is a secret locked up in the breast of Captain Bosco."

"Help me to find out, will you ?" she asked eagerly.

"If I can I will, but how?"

"Now listen to me. I am about to put your vaunted devotion to the test. In yonder side cabin Captain Bosco has charts spread out on a small table. Every day he consults those charts and makes marks and memoranda thereon. On one of those charts I am convinced he marks down the vessel's course each day, and there also is, I am convinced, marked the place of her destination. I wish access to that cabin in order to see those charts. You can procure the key and enable me to gratify my desire. Will you do so—yes or no?"

He hesitated—seemed torn by conflicting thoughts.

Looking up he met her lustrous eyes gazing full on his face with an expression which would have sorely tempted an anchorite.

"Lady, I will do as you wish."

"Thanks. Now I begin to believe in your devotion."

CHAPTER XXX.

GIULIA IN BOSCO'S CABIN.

HAVING once promised Gonfalvo showed no hesitation—no wish to draw back.

"Ah! lady, you doubted my devotion—my deep adoration for you. It shall now be my pride and pleasure to convince you, you were wrong."

"Senor," said Giulia, thinking it a good opportunity to ascertain how far he would go in serving her, "suppose you had it in your power to procure my freedom, would you do so—even at the risk of discovery by Bosco, and incurring his wrath and vengeance?"

"Lady, I have already said that to be assured of your favours, I would incur the wrath and vengeance, not of man only but of heaven."

To be assured of your favours!

She scarcely knew what interpretation to put on the words, and had a misgiving that this fiery young lover of hers might prove very difficult to manage, that he might demand far more than she could promise or grant.

However, depending on her woman's wit and tact, she

determined to go on as she had begun, and bend him to her purpose.

Now, however, that she experienced the fervency of Gonzalvo's passion, she regretted the necessity which compelled her to encourage and mislead him, and did not feel by any means so easy in her mind.

However, she had commenced, and had even opened her plans to the young mulatto, and must go on.

She sent him on deck to ascertain what course the vessel was steering, and any other particulars he could.

He had not been gone many minutes when the door at the top of the companion was opened and Bosco himself descended.

He regarded her narrowly, and she thought with suspicion.

And indeed that was not wonderful, for Giulia had been greatly excited by her interview with the young steward, and showed it in her flushed face, bright eyes, and nervous, restless manner.

Whatever might have been his thoughts he did not give utterance to them, but merely asked—

“Are you well served? Are you in want of anything?”

“Yes,” cried Giulia, “I want my liberty—to be taken back to Havannah and restored to my friends.”

Black Bosco replied never a word. He only grinned, as much as to say, “Don't you wish you may get it;” and then unlocking the little cabin, went in and closed the door behind him.

He had not been there many moments when a cry was heard aloft.

“Sail, ho!”

Taking down a powerful telescope, Bosco hastened on deck, not forgetting, however, to lock the door of the little cabin after him.

Giulia went up to the top of the companion stairs, and seating herself at the closed and fastened door listened intently.

She wished to learn in what direction the vessel in sight was, and what was her character.

For she cherished a wild hope that it might be a vessel sent in pursuit by her father.

She heard Bosco hail the mast-head—

“Where away ?”

“Dead astern, capitano !”

“What do you make of her ?”

“There are only her upper light sails to be seen ; but she seems a large, square-rigged vessel, and I can make out a little smoke.”

Giulia's heart beat high. A vessel right astern—a large, square-rigged vessel, and a steamer.

Probably a man-of-war.

These were the thoughts which flashed through the mind of the captive girl.

Bosco, suddenly opening the companion door, discovered her crouching at the top of the stairs.

She had not time to get away.

“Ah !” he said, starting. “What does this mean ? Listening ?”

She made no reply, but retreated down into the cabin in considerable confusion.

“Ho, ho !” he cried, after reflecting a moment. “I see. You heard the cry, ‘Sail, ho !’ and think that, perhaps, it is a vessel sent to rescue you.”

Then, with a sardonic grin, he again unlocked the little cabin, entered, and shut himself up.

In a few minutes he came out again, and coming to the after-part of the cabin, looked out through the stern windows at the vessel, which was now plainly in sight.

Shutting up the telescope after a long look, he turned to Giulia, and said, savagely—

“You hope that the vessel you can now see is a Spanish man-of-war, in pursuit of this ship, in order to rescue you ? If you knew what I know, you would pray to the Virgin that it might not be so. If that is a Spanish war-ship, and we cannot escape, your hours are numbered.”

With these ominous words, which struck terror to the heart of the captive, he left her and went on deck.

Five minutes afterwards Gonzalvo made his appearance, to her great joy.

She told him of the words of Bosco, and he turned pale.

"What do you imagine he meant?" she asked. "I suppose it was only an idle threat to frighten me."

"As to what he meant—no good," replied the young man gloomily; "and as to idle threats, Bosco never threatens, without doing what he threatens. But I have come to tell you that he has gone aloft. I have got the key. He will probably remain aloft for a quarter of an hour, as is his wont. Take the key, and make all possible haste to consult the charts. I must go on deck to guard against suspicion."

It was true that Bosco has gone aloft, but it was none the less a fact that he had seen Gonzalvo look around him cautiously, and then descend into the cabin where Giulia was kept captive.

The mere fact of his going down would not have excited his suspicions, but the wary look around him first did so.

Bosco kept a keen watch at the cabin companion, and when the steward came up again, called to him from aloft, and sent him down the fore hold on some pretext, and which would keep him at least a quarter of an hour.

Gonzalvo was in a terrible state of anxiety and perturbation, but dared not disobey.

Bosco took another careful look at the vessel astern, and then descended in a leisurely manner, and after seeing that Gonzalvo was doing what he had ordered, quietly opened the companion door with his private key, of which Gonzalvo had a duplicate, and went down.

He looked around the saloon for Giulia.

She was not to be seen.

Then he looked in her sleeping-cabin.

She was not there.

Astonished and alarmed, his eye again swept round the saloon, and he perceived that the door of the little cabin where he kept his charts was slightly open.

He walked up, looked in, and saw her bending over the charts, and then threw wide the door.

"Fire and fury! what does this mean?" he shouted furiously, as he burst into the cabin.

Giulia, terrified by so sudden and unexpected an occurrence, shrieked faintly and shrank away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT GIULIA SAW IN BOSCO'S CABIN.

WHEN Giulia d'Almaviras received the key of the cabin from Gonzalvo, she hastened to make use of it, and scarcely had her infatuated admirer gone on deck than she was in the little cabin and eagerly scanning the charts spread out on the table.

The first one was a chart of Cuba and the West India Islands on Mercator's projection.

It was crossed with figures denoting soundings, and reefs and currents were marked in great abundance.

There was nothing here from which she could gather any information.

Turning to another chart, which was partially rolled up, she saw it was on a larger scale, and almost in outline, the interior of all the lands being left blank, and there being no sounding marks. The various harbours, headlands, lighthouses, and so on, were, however, carefully set down.

On this chart, however, she perceived pencil-marks, and lines traced on the part representing sea, from one port to another. There were several such lines, from the coast of Africa to Cuba—zigzag, irregular lines sometimes—at others, for a space nearly straight.

These Giulia rightly surmised to be the tracks of vessels Bosco had commanded on his various voyages. Those from the south of Africa were slaving voyages. There was a date written at the port of departure, and another off the island of Cuba, with the remarks denoting the cargo had been safely run. The latest dated course of all, however, had a different legend at its termination. In rude, ill-spelled Spanish were these words—

“Chased by a Yankee man-of-war, and sunk by an accursed Englishman.”

And then, still pursuing her researches, she found another track from the harbour of Havannah. There was a date, that of the night she was abducted and carried off.

This track—a distinct pencil line—led first into Matanzas, and then, sweeping round to the westward, passed through

the narrow channel to the west of the island of Cuba, and then led out to sea in a north-easterly direction.

This she at once concluded was the course which the vessel she was once a prisoner in had made.

The distance run each day was marked by a dot, and she was thus able to calculate back from the day of her abduction, and make certain that this was indeed the track of the vessel.

Suddenly the pencilled line came to a full stop. The course had been marked up to that very day at noon. But looking yet more closely, she discovered a very, very faint pencil mark leading from this spot in a straight line out into the Caribbean Sea. She found that this finally ceased at the first of a group of four or five islands. Opposite this island was a cross plainly marked, also in pencil.

Presently she remembered to have seen Black Bosco writing on the margin of the chart, and referring to it she soon discovered a cross corresponding to that opposite the island.

Beneath were these words in Spanish—

"Wedge Island, marked in chart nearly 35 deg. N. too far to the eas,
Wedge-shaped seen from N.N.E. to E. Nearest land bearing E.S.E."

Not having much nautical knowledge, Giulia could not understand all this.

Of one thing, however, she persuaded herself, that this island, with the cross opposite it, where the faint pencil line ended, was their destination. She noticed that a meridian of longitude ran right through it, and glancing her eye to the Equator to where these were marked, read off mentally—longitude—W.

There was more writing on the margin of the chart, and she was just about deciphering it, which would probably have given her much more information, when the sudden appearance of Black Bosco himself startled her, and caused her to shrink away with a shriek of terror.

His first act was to roll up the charts, his second to take the key from the lock, where she had carelessly left it.

To do this he had to go outside the small cabin; and she, instantly taking advantage of the opportunity, darted out into the large saloon.

Bosco, the key in his hand, advanced towards her, his dark countenance scowling with anger.

"Keep off, villain. Do not dare to approach me," she cried, "or I will kill you and myself also. Keep off, I say."

And with these words, quick as thought, out flashed the keen blue-bladed stiletto she carried.

Black Bosco paused.

He neither wished to get an ugly stab himself, nor to drive her to plunge it in her own breast, and either, he thought, was quite possible.

"I must get that cursed little dagger from her," he muttered, as he stood hesitating what to do.

"How did you get this key to open my private cabin?" he again asked; "who dared give it to you?"

She thought of poor infatuated Gonzalvo, and resolved to shield him.

"I found it on the floor of the saloon," she said; "you dropped it when you were down here last."

"It's a lie!" he said; "I could not drop it, I wear it by a chain."

She said no more, but turned haughtily away, and gazed out at the stern port.

"What do you mean by secretly entering my private cabin? What was your object, your reason? It will be better for you to speak—better, perhaps, for your accomplice."

The words made her tremble. She thought of poor Gonzalvo, for whom she entertained a strange mixture of feelings. She was angry with him for his presumption in daring to love her: and yet, with her anger was a sentiment quite the reverse, which all women feel towards those who love them, even though they have no corresponding feeling.

Then she pitied his hopeless passion, and dreaded, beyond all, his incurring Bosco's vengeance for her sake.

So she answered boldly, and looking him straight in the eyes—

"Woman's curiosity, nothing else; I saw you carefully lock the cabin up when you left, and when I saw the key lying on the floor I determined to see what there was inside which you so carefully locked up."

So boldly did she speak, and with such apparent truthfulness and candour, looking him full in the eyes all the while, that for a moment or two he was staggered.

But there was the key—that could not be got over.

He knew that he always had it on a small gold chain, which he kept hung up in his sleeping-cabin.

One key could not have become detached. He must have dropped the chain and all the keys, for her to have gained possession of this one in that way.

However, he said no more, but went up on deck.

She could not help shuddering at the terrible expression on his dark face. He looked more like a vengeful, vindictive, remorseless fiend, than a human being.

She trembled, not for herself, but for Gonzalvo, for she had but too good reason to fear that he suspected by what means she had obtained the key.

However, she had no time to waste, so she hastened to put her plan into operation.

Taking a dozen sheets of paper, she wrote a few lines on each, then she rolled up the paper in the shape of a long cylinder, and inserted each in an empty bottle, which she forthwith proceeded to cork tightly.

As soon as she had finished the first three, she dropped them into the sea out of the stern window.

Then she prepared all the others in the same way, and after waiting a quarter of an hour, threw out three more.

Then, after another interval, three more.

And again three more, until the whole twelve were gone.

By this time she had twelve more prepared in the same manner, tightly corked, and each containing a sheet of paper with writing thereon.

These she kept on dropping into the sea, at intervals of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour.

Before long she had a reserve of two dozen, for she wrote the papers and corked them up rapidly.

These she placed in a locker and covered it over carefully.

Fortunately for the execution of her plans, she was left alone all the afternoon.

And yet this very fact, so favourable to her in one way, disquieted her sadly.

She could not help thinking that it boded ill for poor Goncalvo.

And when, about an hour before sun-down, a stranger—not the handsome, soft-spoken young mulatto, but a hideous, coarse, and repulsive negro—came down, she felt more than ever alarmed.

"You want anything?" he growled in a horrible patois between nigger-English and Spanish.

"No, I thank you," she replied, shrinking away from the brute instinctively.

"What time you have your supper? Capitano Bosco tell me to ask."

"When you please; it is indifferent to me," she said, only too anxious to get rid of him.

The man went on deck, of course carefully locking her in, and she was again alone.

She dropped three more bottles into the sea.

"Oh! kind Virgin," she prayed, with clasped hands, "grant that some of these bottles be seen and picked up by the vessel I now see plainly astern, or by some other. Have pity on your unhappy daughter, and deliver her from the hands of her enemies!"

She felt relieved after this supplication, and the **flame of hope** began to burn brightly in her breast.

The vessel was rapidly overhauling them.

She could now see below the lower yards, and soon the hull would be in sight.

"Surely," she said to herself, "they must observe some of these bottles, and the fact of their being in threes ought to attract attention. Then, if they pick one up and read the paper, even if it be not a Spanish man-of-war sent in chase, I must be saved. They cannot be cruel enough to be deaf to my appeal."

This is what she had written on each slip of paper—

"Help! help! in the name of the Virgin, help! I, Giulia de Cordova d'Almaviras, daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras, have been treacherously abducted from Havannah—at the instigation of a villainous Englishman—by a scoundrel capable of any atrocity, known as Capitano Bosco Negro. The vessel is being steered for an island in the Caribbean Sea, in longitude —— W. exactly, for what purpose I know

not. All this I have ascertained beyond doubt. For the love of the Virgin, help ! ”

This, Giulia thought, was an appeal which would move the compassion of honourable men of any nation ; and having given the longitude of the island, at the very least, information would be forwarded to her father, should any of the bottles be picked up.

Unfortunately, the fair captive had forgotten something very essential.

This was the marginal notes on the side of the chart.

One was to the effect that the island was marked in the chart thirty-five miles farther to the eastward than its true position.

And that other note, of almost equal importance, that the shape of the island was only to be observed from N.N.E. to E.

“ Now miss, am brought you sapper.”

The voice of the hideous nigger aroused her suddenly.

Gazing earnestly out of the stern window at the white sails of the vessel she hoped was destined to rescue her, she had not heard him come down.

“ Thank you,” she said, and turned her head away again.

“ Capitano Bosco send you very nice dish, yah ! ”

She looked round in some astonishment, wondering what such unwonted civility could mean.

She saw on a tray, with a white table cloth, a covered silver dish.

The supper service was excellently appointed—silver plate throughout.

Quite unsuspectingly, she seated herself at the table, and the negro removed the cover.

At the sight which met her eyes she screamed and swooned away.

And well she might.

The amputated hand of a man—that was the dish set before her !

And she recognized the hand as that of the mulatto steward, Gonzalvo, by the emerald ring still on the finger.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GAMBA IN THE CABIN WITH GIULIA.

THE nigger stood and regarded the insensible girl with a hideous grin.

His eyes gleamed and glared till the whites were seen all round, and he kept champing his lips and protruding his great tongue, like some unclean animal about to devour his prey.

He looked round towards the companion-way, then took a step or two towards Giulia, who still lay in a dead faint.

This man was an escaped slave from Pensacola, and one of the worst types of a brutal and depraved race.

The nigger who now glared and gloated over the insensible form of Giulia d'Almaviras was a bad specimen of a debased race.

Fear evidently struggled with other passions in his breast.

He would glance at the companion-way, then again at the lifeless girl.

"Ah! the lovely critter. Wake up! wake up, missa!"

He took her hand, half dragged her up, and then suddenly put his other arm round her waist, and rudely hugged her to his breast.

Giulia struggled and moaned feebly as she began to come to.

But of this the black villain took no notice.

"Ah! white gal—white gal, you Gamba's gal now—yah!"

He was about to kiss her delicate face with his hideous coarse lips, when a hoarse voice was heard—

"Gamba, you black scoundrel, where are you?"

Instantly, and as though he had received a sudden blow, he let her fall back on the couch and bounded away several feet, gazing with the utmost terror at the companion-way, whence the voice proceeded.

The next moment Bosco came down into the saloon.

It was well for the nigger Gamba that he had not come down without first giving him warning.

The nigger well knew that had he been caught by the terrible slave-captain, daring to taste of fruit, not for such as he, he would not have had many minutes to live.

"Well, how did the senorita like the dish I sent her, eh ? Ah ! she's down on her back."

"Went clean into a faint directly she took the cover off, capitano. I was just coming to ask you what to do."

"Ah ! let her be, she'll come round. It'll be a lesson to her."

"Shall I stop and attend her, capitano ?"

"No, you black thief ; I wouldn't trust you any more than I would a hyæna in a sheepfold. If ever you dare come down into this cabin without orders, I'll stick a knife in your throat, and run you up by the heels to the yard-arm, to bleed to death."

Gamba looked as if he was utterly cowed.

The horrible death Bosco had mentioned was a favourite punishment of his, and the nigger had seen more than one poor wretch struggle in agony suspended by the feet for as long as an hour, the blood all the while trickling from a wound, purposely a slight one, in the throat.

Captain Bosco had his crew in thorough subjection ; they held him in the most abject awe and terror, and though he were alone on board, it is certain that such was the terror of his name and his very look that they would not dare rebel.

The nigger slunk away, not even daring to cast a black look on the terrible slave-captain behind his back.

Bosco gazed on the captive girl, who was just beginning to revive, in silence for a moment or two. Then observing the hilt of the little stiletto just peeping out from her bosom, he went up to her, rudely tore open her dress, and took it from her.

"A dangerous she cat this. It is as well to cut her claws."

He stood calmly surveying her, with none of the passionate excitement of the negro Gamba, waiting till she recovered her senses, cruelly anxious to witness her horror on again looking on the dish he had sent her for supper.

And presently she awoke from her faint.

After gazing wildly around for a moment or two, her eyes fell on Bosco.

And then, as though by an irresistible impulse, although she knew what was there, she again looked in that horrible dish.

For on a silver plate, with its own blood for sauce, she

LOVE'S TREASON.

the right hand of the unfortunate Gonzalvo, rudely pped off at the wrist.

The emerald ring he wore on his middle finger, and of which the unhappy mulatto was not a little vain, still glittered there.

"Cruel wretch!" gasped Giulia, and hid her face in her hands.

He stood by, looking on and enjoying the scene with fiendish glee.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CABINET.

AFTER a while, Bosco spoke in savage, brutal tones, like the growl of a wild beast—

"Such is the vengeance of Black Bosco, on those who dare attempt betraying him. Beware how you venture to trifle with me agaiu, my charming senorita. Should you do so. I will find another punishment for you."

"Kill me, if you like, you cruel wretch."

"Ah! no, I shall not do that, at least, not first. What I shall do will be this. I will come down here to you with that handsome nigger, Gamba ; with his assistance I shall bind you securely, so that you will be helpless as an infant, I shall then leave you with the sweet and amiable Gamba. telling him he can do with you as he pleases."

A sudden fury possessed her as she heard these atrocious words.

Starting to her feet, she sprang at him, crying out in her rage and indignation—

"Monstrous and inhuman wretch ! you shall pay dearly for this. My father, my friends, shall hunt you down, and wreak on you a terrible revenge."

"Perhaps, so. Meanwhile, I, at all events, can be first in that line of business."

"You think, perhaps, you will escape with impunity, but you are mistaken. See, even now a noble vessel in pursuit gains fast upon you. You will be caught—hanged to the yard-arm, and I shall be rescued."

"As to my being hanged, that may be or may not be,

They do say that I am bound to be hanged some day. But as to your being rescued, why, that's just a different matter altogether. If that vessel astern is in chase of me, and boards me to search for you, I'll stake every dollar I've got in the world they won't find you."

"Ah ! you think you can conceal me in some secret cabin ? But do not flatter yourself ; they will find me if they have to ransack every inch of the ship."

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! let them ransack !" laughed Black Bosco ; "they won't find you—they'll be clever if they do. Ah ! no, no, sweet senorita, I have arranged all matters excellently. I am having prepared for you a charming little cabinet---such a comfortable retreat."

"A cabinet !"

"Yes, a box—a box of wood, in shape not unlike a coffin ' in fact, we'll call it a coffin."

His words and strange look puzzled and alarmed her.

What could he mean ? A cabinet ! a box ! a coffin !

Some more terrible mysteries—more horrors looming in the future.

"Surely," she said to herself, "never was a high-born maiden in such miserable plight."

"Have you quite finished with your supper, senorita," he asked scoffingly, "especially the delicacy on the silver dish ?"

She made him no answer, but shrank shudderingly away, avoiding looking at the dreadful object.

Bosco took the severed hand, and drew the ring from the finger without the least appearance of compunction.

"Can't afford to feed the fishes on emerald rings. As to the other—here goes the hand of a traitor."

With these words he coolly tossed the amputated hand into the sea.

"When next you attempt to tamper with my servants, senorita, it will be the head, not the right hand, I will send you for your supper."

She made him no reply, but kept her face buried in her hands, full of horror at the terrible scene enacted before her.

"There, I'll make you a present of this ring," he said. "It will serve to remind you of your paramour—for such, of course, he was,"

He tossed the ring, stained with the blood of the unfortunate Gonzalvo, on to the ottoman by her side.

Even this last insult did not arouse the unhappy captive or cause her to lift her head or remove her hands, which covered her face. She lay and sobbed and moaned till long after sundown.

By degrees she regained her composure, and though heart-broken and as utterly wretched as it is possible to conceive, the thought of the pursuing vessel astern brought her some little consolation.

Once more she began to hope, and stifling her grief, seated herself on the after lockers, and through the open port looked out over the sea at the faint speck astern, which she knew to be a vessel.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MORE STEAM GOT UP.

THE night seemed to Giulia d'Almaviras as though it were twenty hours long, instead of about ten, and this the more so from the fact that about two hours after midnight clouds and mists shut out from her view the dark spot astern gradually growing larger and larger, which she knew to be the pursuing vessel, and fervently hoped—believed even—to be a Spanish man-of-war sent out to rescue her.

She sat half crouching on the stern lockers, her hands clasping her knees, gazing with sad, earnest eyes through the port, hoping to see each minute the gleaming lights of the steamer astern shining through the obscurity.

But as morning approached the mist grew heavier, the weather thicker generally, and the young girl looking out from the stern port could discern nothing but the dark sea, broken by phosphorescent flashes, and the grey gloom of the night shutting out everything from view at a greater distance than half-a-mile from the *Vendetta*.

And so waned on the weary night.

Just as the first faint light of dawn began to tinge the dreary waste of darkness with an ashen grey hue, a flash of flame leaping forth, as it seemed, from the mist-bank astern of the vessel, caused Giulia to start up.

She was on her feet and eagerly gazing out with her hand over her eyes ere the report following the flash had time to come.

Boom !

A man-of-warsman could have told at once that it was a heavy gun which had just been fired.

After the flash and report all was again silence and darkness.

Giulia remained standing, bending forward with clasped hands, like some lovely statue—lips apart—eyes almost glaring with eagerness—every faculty, almost every sense, strained to the utmost.

But minutes passed on, and she neither saw nor heard anything.

She was about sinking down again on the locker utterly weary, and feeling a reaction of despondency at no immediate consequences following on this first cannon report.

For she, in her eagerness and ignorance, thought that the first shot would be followed up instantly by a vigorous cannonade, and that in the course of some half-hour or so the pursuing vessel would be alongside the *Vendetta*, herself rescued, and the villain Bosco brought to a stern account for the outrage.

Woman like, at the first signs of assistance she concluded that the affair was finished—the battle won.

Just as she was thus giving way again to despondency, her heart was made to leap again in her bosom by the sight of another flash.

Shortly following this and before the report was borne on the night air she heard a sort of sighing moan aloft.

It was the round-shot tearing away far overhead, but nevertheless in a good direction.

The fact of its roaring past far aloft proved another fact, and a most unwelcome one to Bosco—that the vessel astern was well within range.

He growled forth an oath as he heard the moan of the bristling iron, a sound with which he was well acquainted, for he had been many times chased.

It was now almost day, and quite light enough to make out any vessel at some miles distance.

Pedro, who had been looking dead astern, grasped arm.

"There she is---a Spanish frigate, by all the saints!"

Bosco, looking in the same direction, beheld a big ship coming out from what was like a wall of fog and mist.

"Ten thousand devils!" roared the captain of the *Vendetta*, "she will be alongside us in a couple of hours."

"Her cannon-shot will be alongside, and perhaps into us a bit sooner," remarked Pedro drily.

Both vessels were now plainly in sight of each other, and there could not be a shadow of doubt as to the one astern of the *Vendetta* being a man-of-war, and also that she was in pursuit, and determined to overhaul her.

Having given strict orders that, let the risk be what it might, steam was to be kept up at its present pitch, he went up the ladder.

Scarcely had he reached the deck than he heard the splash of a round-shot, and also a crashing, splintering sound, which seemed to denote that the vessel had been hit somewhere.

Running aft, he was met by the mate Pedro.

"She's got it close to the stern-post, capitano, and the rudder's damaged."

Black Bosco gave vent to one of those volleys of oaths always at his command.

Then he stopped considered for a moment, and said—

"You're sure the rudder's hit?"

"At any rate, it's jammed, and is of little or no good till it's put straight."

"Ah! and before we can do that the stranger will be alongside. Very well, we'll obey orders. Take in all square sails, and get that cabinet along."

Then he shouted down the engine hatch.

"Ease her!"

Partly by means of the helm which was not quite in order, and partly by means of manoeuvring with the sails, the vessel's head was brought round in a direction at right angles to her former course, just as another round-shot howling through the air gave a hint that to ~~heave to~~ was the most advisable course,

"Now then," shouted Black Bosco, "hurry along with that cabinet. Leave it at the top of the cabin companion-way, you niggers. Now then, Pedro, you and I can carry it down and fix this gal's business ourselves."

What was it they were about to do?

What meant this mysterious cabinet? and why was it to be taken into the cabin where Giulia was confined?

CHAPTER XXXV

THE USE OF THE CABINET.

GIULIA D'ALMAVIRAS, as the grey dawn slowly broke, was still seated half crouching on the stern locker.

She watched eagerly for each flash and report of the cannon, and the shriek of the round-shot so disagreeable to Black Bosco was sweet music to her ears.

By-and-by, when it was quite daylight, and the pursuing vessel was quite distinctly visible, masts, spars, hull, guns, everything betokening a large and powerfully-armed frigate, there came a flash and a puff of smoke from her bow.

And in a second or two there was a great splash in the water some two hundred yards astern, and then, as the round globe of iron ricochetted over the water, it struck the surface again close under the stern of the steamer.

Giulia was drenched with the spray thrown up, and now for the first time realized the fact that there was actual danger to herself in this cannonade, which had so delighted her as affording evidence that it was impossible for Bosco to escape.

She had barely finished arranging her wetted hair, and removing as best she could the traces of the sea-spray from her attire, when she heard the cabin door at the top of the companion open, and footsteps descending slowly and with difficulty, as if carrying a burden.

Determined to be discovered in as calm and composed a state as possible, she seated herself again on the locker, and looked out on the sea.

To her surprise, and at first to her great dismay, the other vessel was no longer visible.

She noticed, however, that the *Venetta* was no longer straining and tearing through the waves like a frightened animal striving to escape from the fangs of a lion, and then it struck her that Bosco was about to heave his ship to and surrender.

It was indeed a fact that he had determined to allow himself to be boarded by the pursuing frigate.

But he had a scheme in his head for avoiding all penalties for his crime, and indeed preventing its ever being known beyond surmise, which, for diabolical ingenuity and with no less wickedness, out-did all the enormities Bosco had ever yet been guilty of.

As he thought over this precious scheme and elaborated it in his brain, the slave-captain chuckled to himself.

He quickly made the necessary preparations for carrying out his plan, of which the cabinet formed the principal one.

"If they do come to look for her, why, then, I guess they'll be puzzled to find her," he said with a chuckle to Pedro.

Down they came with heavy, lumbering steps—Pedro, the mate and Black Bosco. Giulia sat still, and seemed to take but little notice of them.

She wished to appear as unmoved as possible, but nevertheless, could not but feel some curiosity as to what they were doing—what their object could be in carrying such a strange-looking object.

Then all at once it struck her that it was the "cabinet" of which she had before heard.

And then she began to speculate as to its use, and their intentions in bringing it down here.

Her curiosity overcoming her pride, she arose and approached a few paces nearer to them, wondering and puzzling as to what possible contrivance it could be, and how it could concern her.

It was, as we have said, an oblong box, about six feet in height, and perhaps a foot and a half or three quarters wide.

It was, in fact, like a long case without a lid.

As Giulia gazed, a shudder shot over her.

It struck her that it resembled a coffin.

Could it be that they intended to use it as her coffin?

Well might she shudder as she gazed on the cunning,

malevolent face of Pedro, the mate, and the still more villainous countenance of Black Bosco !

They looked as though they were capable of any atrocity.

"Now then, Pedro, are you ready ?" said the slave-captain.

"All ready, capitano."

Bosco now came in front, and minutely inspected the interior of the cabinet, loosening some straps, and bringing them outside, and making other arrangements.

This done, he came close to Giulia, who, determining to keep up a bold front, stood her ground.

"Now, senorita," he said, "I want to see how this piece of furniture fits you. So just step in, if you please."

"Fits me?" she cried. "I do not understand you. Beware how you offer any outrage or violence to me. Those who are able and willing to protect and avenge me, if need be, are at hand."

"Will you oblige me by just stepping inside that little cabinet ? You will observe that I have carefully lined it with canvas, and have also placed a sort of stool for you to stand upon. Come, my dark-eyed beauty, time presses."

With these words, he suddenly stretched out his hand and seized her by the arm.

"Allow me to assist you," he said, with a sardonic smile.

"Villain, loose me," she cried, passionately, and endeavouring to break away from him.

But he held her too firmly for her to escape, and the next instant Pedro, having crept round behind her, threw himself on her, seizing her by the other arm and shoulder, so that almost before she could cry out or even struggle, the two powerful men had forced her bodily into the cabinet, her back to the back of it, her face looking out.

Pedro held her whilst Black Bosco hastily secured some straps, which passed from side to side within.

One went across her breast, another over her waist, while a third tightly strapped her legs at the knee.

She found herself in half a minute pinioned, utterly helpless, strapped upright in what she had but too good reason to fear would prove her coffin.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GIULIA BOUND IN THE CABINET.

SCARCELY had Black Bosco thus secured the unfortunate Giulia than two loud reports, followed by a shout from some of the crew, betokening that something had happened, caused him to rush upon deck calling to Pedro to follow him.

The *Vendetta* was now going at half-speed only, and in a direction crossing the course of the pursuing frigate, instead of right away from her as before.

But the man-of-war did not appear to be satisfied with this, and evidently her captain was not in a mood to be trifled with.

Two shots in rapid succession across the bows of the *Vendetta*, the latter of which carried away her bowsprit, served as gentle hints to Black Bosco to heave to at once.

Seeing no help for it, he gave the order down the engine-room to stop her, and hoisted the Spanish flag.

He waited and looked to see an answering flag from the frigate.

But no ensign or flag of any sort floated from her peak.

She came steadily on, without flag or device to denote her nation.

"Come along," said Bosco, hurrying down the companion-way into the cabin ; "we have little time to lose ; we must make haste and finish this business."

He found Giulia fast bound in the cabinet, which he had leanced up against a bulkhead.

As she was strapped in, it was impossible for her to escape, or even to move beyond a very little.

She had struggled desperately for a minute or so, but finding it utterly useless, desisted.

"Heaven's will be done !" she said passionately. "Holy Mother ! if I am to die thus, receive my spirit."

And then this poor ill-treated, unhappy girl resigned herself with calm composure to whatever fate might be in store for her.

"Murderers, do your worst !" she said in a calm voice, which surprised even Bosco—so deep, firm, and without any

trace of fear was it. "I am prepared to die ; you will feel the vengeance of man in this world, and of God in the next, for this cruel outrage on a helpless woman."

"We'll chance that," replied the ruffian Bosco, whom nothing could daunt or turn aside from his purpose. "Come, lay hold, Pedro. You take the feet, I'll manage the head."

They took up the coffin-like box containing the form of Giulia, and Pedro, crawling up on the locker with his end, placed it over the sill of the port.

"Are the weights at the feet all right ?" asked Bosco.

Pedro, after a brief examination, replied—

"All right, capitano."

"Shove forward, then."

Involuntarily the unhappy Giulia gave vent to a faint cry.

"Ah ! Holy Mary ! save and help me ! They are about to murder me !"

It seemed all plain enough to her now.

They had fastened her up in this cabinet as in a coffin. It was weighted at the feet, and now that they were about to be boarded by her rescuers they were about to cast her into the sea, when of course cabinet and all would sink to the depths of the sea, leaving no record of either crime—the abduction or the murder following on it.

Giulia was brave, and had prayed for strength, but now that the supreme moment had come she felt as though she would swoon.

"Shove forward, Pedro," she heard the voice of Black Bosco say.

Then she felt the box grate over the sill of the port, and knew that her feet hung over the sea.

Another foot or so and all would be over.

Her last moment had come !

Then her fortitude gave way to this extent, that she gave vent to a scream of agony.

"Now then, what are you making that noise for ?" shouted Black Bosco, furiously ; "you are not dead yet, but, by the souls of all the men I've killed, if you make that noise once more, over you go."

Giulia, who retained her senses, understood that she was not to be immediately murdered.

Bosco now took a piece of thin rope and made it securely fast to the head or top part of the cabinet—Giulia's coffin, as it seemed likely to be—calling Pedro to support it the while.

Then he led this rope through a ring-bolt in a beam over-head, and then down again through another near the fore end of the cabin and the companion-stairs.

He then hauled on this rope.

"Lift up, Pedro, lift up her head," he shouted.

Pedro obeyed, and as he did so Bosco hauled in on the rope.

By this means the end of the cabinet where was Giulia's head was hoisted up towards the deck above, or what landsmen would call the ceiling.

It was thus in a slanting position, half hanging out of the port, and almost entirely suspended by the rope.

It was quite certain that if the rope was let go Giulia would be plunged into the sea, and sink never to rise again.

"Now then, listen to me," said Black Bosco, coming close up to Giulia ; "what I've got to say to you I shall say in a very few words. In the first place, if you scream or make any noise I shall instantly drop you into the sea. The cabinet in which you are is suspended by a rope fast from the head, and it is hanging half out of the port, as perhaps you are aware. The rope leads aft to the companion-way, and I shall take it on deck and make it fast, so that I can cut it at any moment I please, when you, box and all, will disappear from the scene for ever. Very likely, it will be necessary for me to do so, and I shall, without the least doubt. So I advise you to prepare for death. If this is a Spanish man-of-war sent in pursuit of me, my own safety demands that you should not be found on board. You observe that it would be hard to conceal you from eager searchers, and I thought so too, so I hit upon a dark hiding place where, if I sent you, you would never be found. This, then, is your shroud. If the frigate has merely overhauled me to see if there's slaves on board, or contraband, or for any other reason, except of what you hoped a short time back, and I think now most likely, why, then you are saved. That is to say, if the officer does not insist on penetrating

to this cabin so as to discover you. If he does, or if they are in search of you, why, then you are a dead woman, for I am determined they shall never find you."

Then Black Bosco strode away, followed by Pedro, leaving the unhappy Giulia in an agony of terror, expecting each moment that the rope would be cut, and that she would be engulfed in the sea.

It was indeed a terrible and awful position.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE VENDETTA BOARDED BY THE YANKEE.

As Black Bosco passed up the cabin companion-stairs he took the rope which held the unfortunate Giulia suspended over the raging waters and made it fast to a cleat.

"You can stand here, Pedro, on the steps," he said, "neither in the cabin nor on deck, so as not to be in sight. The instant you hear me whistle cut the rope with your knife. Cut, you understand; don't cast off; it will be safer and quicker to cut. You understand?"

"All right, capitano," said Pedro, drawing his keen sheath-knife and taking up his post on the companion-stairs; "I'll cut quick enough, never fear."

"Or else," said Black Bosco, by way of final warning, "the garotte, you know—the iron collar round your neck."

"I tell you I'll do it, capitano," repeated Pedro, with gloomy desperation; "I'll do it if there were a dozen innocent maidens at the end of the rope."

"Good," said Bosco, and hastened on deck.

In a few minutes a boat from the frigate was alongside, and two officers, a lieutenant and a midshipman, boarded the *Vendetta*.

Black Bosco, affecting an easy unconcern he did not feel, advanced to the gangway to receive the officer.

"What vessel's this?" asked the latter.

"The Spanish merchant steamer, *Vendetta*," replied Bosco, who now felt a little more at his ease, for he thought he could tell for certain that his questioner was not a Spanish officer, although he could not distinguish the uniform of

either him or the midshipman, by reason of the heavy cloaks they wore to counteract the cold raw morning air.

"Merchant steamer, eh!" said the officer, with an unmistakable Yankee twang in his speech; "what's them guns for, eh? Reckon merchant ships arn't armed in gen'ral."

"Well, you see, sir," replied Bosco, deferentially, "we're bound on a trading voyage among the islands, and perhaps Borneo and the China Seas, and, as you know, the savages are often treacherous and bloodthirsty, and there's heaps of pirates about."

"You're right there, skipper; I've been in those parts with Commodore Wilkes's expedition, and know a little about it. What's your cargo?"

"General; such as is likely to be useful on a trading voyage, but we're principally in ballast."

"Ah! well, I must search strictly—off with your hatches."

"Certainly, sir," replied Black Bosco; "but may I ask what ship yours is?"

"The U. S. frigate *Rapidan*," last from cruising off Cuba. Bosco's countenance fell as he heard this.

"Perhaps, after all, they have heard of the abduction, and their captain has volunteered to assist a friendly nation in overhauling a criminal who has abducted a daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras."

"May I ask what is your object in boarding and searching this ship?"

"Yes, you're welcome to ask," replied the Yankee officer, quictly.

"Well?"

"But I ain't a-going to answer till I've had my search out—right fore and aft—do you understand that, mister? Right fore and aft, from forecastle to stern cabin."

Black Bosco did understand, and his countenance fell.

He now very strongly suspected that the fair Giulia was the object of the Yankee's search.

It is true he had means at his disposal—terrible, diabolical means—of for ever putting her beyond reach of discovery by him or any one else, but in doing so he must perforce lose his prize, his most valuable prisoner.

"Just as you like," he said, moodily, and gave the order for the fore and main hatches to be taken off.

The Yankee officer, accompanied by Bosco, walked forward to the fore hatch.

"Hallo! what is this?" he said, pointing to a pale and ghastly object stretched on a mattress at the foot of the fore-mast.

A dark complexioned, slender youth, with handsome features, which were now, however, ghastly pale and distorted by pain—the right hand was swathed in linen cloths, which were perfectly saturated with blood, so as to present a horrid sight.

It was no other than the unfortunate steward, who, for daring to give Giulia the key of the little cabin, had been thus barbarously punished by Black Bosco, the slave-captain having himself stricken off the unhappy young man's right hand.

"Oh! it's nothing," replied Bosco, coolly, "only one of my men had an accident—jammed his hand—it's getting better."

"Poor devil, he seems bad enough, and in pain, too—looks as if he'd slip his cable."

"Not much loss; a lazy, sneaking hound."

The Yankee officer, who was a humane man, looked with disgust at the ruffian who could thus speak of an unfortunate wounded man, evidently in great agony.

"Lead on down the forehold, sir, and stay—send for lanterns."

Black Bosco obeyed, and the officer made a thorough search of the forepart of the vessel, even insisting on having the coals turned up.

But with all his researches and trouble he discovered nothing.

Next he followed the same plan down the forehold, where he came across some kegs of powder, ammunition, lead for casting bullets, a case of rifles, and another of pistols, besides about a hundred cutlasses and boarding pikes.

These, however, Bosco explained were not at all in excess of the possible necessities of the voyage, for they were bound to parts where not only might a plentiful supply of arms

and ammunition be needful for defence, but where also such articles were the best possible to barter with.

The Yankee looked suspicious, but finally accepted the explanation, and came on deck.

"Well, sir, I hope you are satisfied," said Black Bosco.

"So far so good; but I have not seen all over this craft of yours yet—let me see, there is your cabin."

"Of course, if you insist you can go down in the cabin, but there is a lady there very ill," urged Bosco, now much disconcerted.

He still suspected that the real object of the Yankee's search was Giulia d'Almaviras, and of course he felt proportionately alarmed.

"Nevertheless, my friend, I must go down into this cabin of yours."

Bosco looked as black as thunder. Looking in the Yankee officer's face, he saw that the latter meant what he said, and it would be utterly useless to attempt to dissuade him.

Giulia's life hung in the balance as the cabinet in which she was strapped hung by a rope.

"Very well, sir, as you please. I will just whistle for my steward."

Then he placed a small silver whistle to his mouth, and blew a shrill blast.

An instant afterwards a faint cry was heard.

"What was that?" asked the officer.

"I think it's my sick wife crying out in her pain," answered Bosco, fabricating this dreadful lie in very mockery.

For he knew right well from whence the faint cry really came.

Just at that moment the frigate fired a gun, and, looking towards her, the lieutenant beheld signals flying, which he, knowing the code nearly by heart, was able to decipher—

"Return at once if you have discovered nothing. Another sail in sight. We must give chase instantly."

"Ha!" he cried, "I must go on board my own vessel directly. Wish you good voyage, captain."

"Won't you come down and satisfy yourself as to the cabin?" asked Bosco, who felt secure on that point now.

This had the effect of disarming the suspicions of the Yankee. He hesitated a moment or two.

"No, not now. I must make haste back."

"Will you tell me why you boarded me?" asked Bosco, "now that you find out you had no reason?"

"Yes, I will tell you now," said the lieutenant, as he went over the gangway. "We are cruising in search of a rebel privateer, the *Turtle Dove*, they have the impudence to call her. Confound such *Turtle Doves*, I say. She's done more than a million dollars worth of damage within the last month to our mercantile marine, and is making prizes of our rich homeward-bounders right and left. You answered to her description, and we thought you might be the *Dove* herself. Now you know."

Then he went down into the boat, and was rowed back to the *Rapidan*.

"Hem!" thought Black Bosco, "I might do worse—might start this craft as a rebel privateer on my own hook. What prizes I might make! I needn't stick too particular. If I don't think that'll be the best plan now the other game's all over, the gal being at the bottom of the sea by this time; at least, I suppose she is."

Pedro came up at this moment. He was ghastly pale—a cold sweat was on his face and forehead and neck, and his eyes had a wild, horrified look. Murder was written on his face.

"Have you done it—cut the rope?" asked Bosco.

He bowed his head in token of acquiescence, as though unable to speak.

"Speak, can't you? Have you done the business?" asked Bosco savagely. "As it happens, it was not necessary."

A sort of a groan of agony and remorse broke from Pedro.

He was a murderer—a cold-blooded murderer of an innocent, helpless girl; and now he heard, to his horror, that his dreadful crime was unnecessary.

"What the dickens is the matter with the fellow? Can't you speak, curse you? Have you cut the rope, and sent the girl to the bottom of the sea?"

"Yes," replied Pedro in a hollow voice, "*did you not hear her death shriek?*"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FOUR STEAMERS.

On the wings of fancy let us soar high aloft into the blue vault of heaven. Higher than ever the strong-winged eagle mounted—higher than ever daring aeronaut ventured to ascend, and from this giddy height, miles above the clouds, let us look down on the vast expanse of the Spanish Main and the Caribbean Sea, all dotted and sprinkled with islets and larger islands.

We see, amongst other vessels, merchantmen, coasters, and fisher craft, hanging about the coasts, four steamers.

One with a single funnel and three masts standing to the south-east.

We have been on board her; have seen her captain, mate, and crew, and witnessed some of the diabolical deeds there perpetrated.

This is the *Vendetta*; Black Bosco the captain.

Some two hundred miles astern of this vessel another is standing, in nearly the same course, to the south-east.

Both seem bound to the Caribbean Sea.

The second steamer does not appear to be so large as the *Vendetta*, though in reality there is very little difference in their tonnage.

The second steamer is sharper built, and of a shape which, though peculiar, is by no means ungraceful.

That shape is something like that of the wedge, tapering from the bow until close to the quarter within a few fathoms of her stern, where her greatest breadth of beam is.

As a rule vessels have their greatest beam a little way abaft amidships, and by no means so near the stern as is the case in this vessel.

She is evidently built for speed, a clipper probably, under sail as under steam.

She also has three masts, a fore and main mast, with topsail and topgallant yards, and a mizenmast to carry a spanker and gaff topsail.

The whiteness of her decks, the polish of her rails, the brightness of her brass guns, and a hundred other little things, at once apparent to a seaman's eye, bespeak her either a swift war steamer with a dandy captain, or the private yacht of some personage of great wealth.

This latter is the fact.

She had been built for the private yacht of the Marquis d'Almaviras.

Her name is the *Avenger*, Captain Edward Blake, and the name of the chief lieutenant is John O'Brien.

So now the reader is again brought into the company of some old friends, of whom we have perhaps for too long a time lost sight.

But before doing so we will glance at the other two steamers. There is one at the moment of which we speak, bearing about south-east by east from the *Avenger*, distant perhaps a hundred miles.

As this steamer is steaming direct for the *Avenger*, it is obvious they must soon run in sight of each other, and indeed, pass close to each other, the one steering to the north-west, the other south-east.

This vessel is the Yankee steam frigate *Rapidan*, by which the *Vendetta* has been boarded, and some of the letter-laden bottles committed to the sea by the unfortunate Giulia d'Almaviras picked up.

And lastly we come to the fourth steamer.

This one is nearly right astern of the *Avenger*, distant some four hundred miles.

She has not long left the port of Havannah, and having rounded the western-most point of the island of Cuba, is also steering to the north-east, also bound, it would seem, to the Caribbean Sea.

So here we have three steamers steering on the same course, bound to the same part of the ocean. The *Vendetta*, il Capitano Bosco Negro ; the *Avenger*, Captain Edward Blake, two hundred miles astern ; another four hundred miles astern of the *Avenger*.

This third one is named the *Maritana*; the captain is one Joachim Gonzalvez, in his way as great a ruffian as Black Bosco himself.

One is the ferocious and terrible tiger, the other rather resembles the wily, creeping serpent.

Possibly we shall make a closer acquaintance with her, but for the present we will transport ourselves on board the *Avenger*.

It is early in the forenoon watch, a glorious tropical morning, the wind a gentle breeze, the sea a pleasantly-rippled sheet of water.

Ned Blake is reclining on the gratings right aft by the traffrail, buried in deep thought.

Jack O'Brien, his faithful friend and lieutenant, coming aft on the other side, approaches him and slaps him on the shoulder ere he is aware of his presence.

"Wake up, my boy!" cries the light-hearted Irishman. "What the devil are you dreaming of!—building castles in the air, or trying to square the circle by mental arithmetic, eh?"

"Neither, Jack. I was not calculating, and certainly at that time I was not building castles in the air, for I was not thinking of the future or even of the present."

"And what the devil are you thinking of then, eh?"

"The past, Jack."

"The past!"

"Aye, the past—the black past."

"To blazes with the past! I agree with you, my boy, 'tis a dirty past, and for that reason I'd have nothing to do with it at all."

"I can't help thinking of my ruined prospects—my disgraced name."

"Och! to blazes with your croaking! Sure you are badly treated—very badly treated, and that's all about it. Everything will come right some of these days, and then you will be done justice to."

"No, no, Jack, I fear not," said Blake, sadly.

"Ad—out it's just a certainty—that's all."

"How do you make that out?" asked Blake, with a smile.

"In this way. We're gung to find the señorita, rescue her from the villain who is the dave carried her off, and restore her to her father—are we not?"

"We're going to try?"

"And of course we'll do it. Well, then, that done, the thing is settled, and the girl will be bound then to come forward and prove that your statement before the court-martial is absolutely true, and that Lieutenant Walker is a perjured villain. She would do that, would she not ?"

"I think she would, suppose we were so fortunate as to rescue her as you say. But, my dear boy, it would be too late."

"Too late ! Why ?"

"I have been tried—found guilty—sentence has been pronounced—approved off—and I have been dismissed her Majesty's service in disgrace."

"Bah ! what's that ?"

"Ruin to me," replied Blake, gloomily.

"Nonsense. Sure we can petition the Lords of the Admiralty, and lay the whole case before them. They must do you justice. If they didn't, we'd petition Parliament ; and if Parliament couldn't do you justice, why, we'd petition her Majesty herself. Leave it to me, my boy. I'll worry their lives out but what I'll have justice for you."

"Devil doubt you as to the worrying, Jaek, old boy," replied Blake, laughing. "I think, as the saying is, you'd make it pretty hot for them."

"I would so, and I'd win the day, me boy. And we'll win the day now in this little business—by the holy poker, we will. We'll find the girl, and we'll fight her enemies, and we'll thrash 'em all dead, every mother's son of 'em. And then we'll sail back in triumph to her father's hall. Hoorah ! glory, my boy. There's a prospect for you !"

Jack O'Brien, full of spirits, tossed his cap up, and caught it again, and, in a measure, infected Blake with his own enthusiasm.

The man at the wheel looked round in some astonishment, though the crew were beginning to get accustomed to the vagaries of their light-hearted first lieutenant.

Edward Blake laughed, and could not help feeling cheerful and hopeful under the influence of Jack's sunny nature.

"Well, now, look here, my boy," pursued Jack O'Brien. "Isn't everything in our favour ? Haven't you got the command of a splendid steamer—a clipper sailor too, that

would beat most merchantmen, though she hadn't a pound of coal on board? Isn't she well found—cannon, small arms, ammunition, stores, and with a rattling crew?"

"Right, Jack."

"Haven't you made excellent terms with the old marquis? Haven't you bargained with him for his daughter's hand? Can't you marry her—the richest heiress in Cuba—if you like—eh, my boy?"

"Yes, if I like, Jack. But I shall not like. I wish to have a triumph over her in return for the insulting scorn with which she treated me. I wish to have a right to her hand, and then refuse it—cast it off as some worthless thing."

"Then, bedad, you're a bigger fool than I took you to be. I didn't think there could be such a big fool in this created world. What! refuse to take for a wife the handsomest girl and the richest heiress in all Cuba! The man's mad—stark, staring mad!"

"There's a deal of method in his madness though, Jack. Besides, we haven't found her yet even, to say nothing as to gaining the day; for I expect those who were audacious enough to abduct her will be found strong enough to make a desperate resistance."

"To blazes with their resistance!" cried Jack, contemptuously. "We'll just smash 'em up entirely, that's what we'll do."

Blake smiled again, and thought to himself—"Surely never was there such a high-spirited, hopeful, reckless mortal as this, and withal a braver heart or truer friend."

"Not found her!" continued O'Brien; "why, haven't you got the latitude and longitude of the place they're going to take her to, all complete? And besides, don't our vessel sail and steam like a witch? By the Piper that played before Moses, we'll overhaul the vagabonds before ever they reach their island. See if we don't."

"No such luck, I'm afraid, Jack," said Blake, shaking his head.

At this moment the look-out on the fore topgallant yard (Blake always kept a man up there) hailed—

"Smoke a-head."

"What do you make of it?" shouted Ned Blake, going forward.

"A steamer, I think, sir."

"Can you make out which way she's standing?"

"No, sir, but we're coming up with her. I've been watching her a good quarter of an hour before I hailed, to make certain, and we're nearer, for the smoke's as plain again."

Jack O'Brien laid his hand on Captain Blake's shoulder.

"There you are, my boy; that's the steamer, bet your life."

"What steamer?"

"Why, the steamer that's got the *senorita*, the marquis's daughter, on board, to be sure; knew we should come up with her on the high seas."

"Oh! nonsense, Jack."

"Is it nonsense? you wait a bit, you'll see. I reckon I'd better see to the big guns and get the small arms ready."

Nothing would convince Jack O'Brien that this was not the particular vessel of which they were in pursuit.

We shall see the result by-and-by.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GIULIA D'ALMAVIRAS WAS MAD.

IT is quite possible that the reader may wish to hear something further of the *Vendetta* and the doings of Black Bosco.

Also, perhaps, he may desire to learn something more definite and precise concerning the fate of the unhappy Giulia d'Almaviras.

So, leaving the *Avenger* to pursue her course—rapidly drawing nearer to the steamer just sighted—we will once again go on board the *Vendetta*.

We will suppose forty-eight hours to have elapsed since the events in which Black Bosco and Pedro bore such terrible parts.

So that it is now the second morning since the *Vendetta* was boarded by the lieutenant and midshipman of the Yankee man-of-war.

The rudder has been repaired, a fresh jibboom rigged out, and the vessel is in perfect order. She is going merrily on her course under steam and sail.

Black Bosco and Pedro the mate are on the topgallant forecastle, the former looking a-head through a telescope at a low, dark, indistinct line or faint ribbon on the horizon which no one but a seaman would notice.

It is land ; and the captain of the *Vendetta* is anxiously endeavouring to ascertain by its appearance whether it is the coast he expects and thinks it is.

Pedro seems to have recovered altogether from his fit of remorse, and now laughs and jokes the captain about his patron St. Diavolo, as usual.

"I'm almost certain it's the island," said Black Bosco, "though I can make out neither the point nor Sugar-loaf Hill, as I call it."

"And what about the Quoin—the Gunner's Quoin ? Can you see anything of that ?"

"Of course not, blunderhead ; I don't expect to see that till we get round the point."

"Well, I suppose we shall know for certain in another hour."

"Yes, dead certain. She's doing a good ten knots, and the tide's in her favour. We shall be close up with the land before noon. See and get a bag of biscuits, a keg of water, a musket, a little powder and bullets, some old sail-cloth, a small hatchet, some nails, and a coil of rope, and put them in one of the quarter boats. I reckon that will be a tolerable fair allowance, and no one can say I ain't a humane man, eh, Pedro ?" he added, with a grin.

"But what is all this for ?" asked Pedro in some surprise.

"Oh ! I am going to put a passenger ashore on one of the islands."

"A passenger !"

"Yes, certainly ; or, if you like it better, a rascally traitor—"

"You mean—"

"That cursed mulatto steward, of course, who gave the girl the keys of my private cabin. Ah ! by-the-bye, since he's so fond of writing, he shall have the materials. See there are pens, ink, and paper in the boat also, Pedro. He shall write love letters to the seals and penguins on his desert island, if he likes."

They were walking up and down the main deck now, from the funnel as far as the forecastle, talking as they walked.

Neither noticed as they passed the foremast, that on the other side the same figure with the ghastly pain-marked face, and hand bound up with bloody rags, lay extended on a mattress, and nearly covered and concealed by an old sail.

This was Giulia's aspiring but unfortunate admirer--the mulatto steward.

He listened--his heart burning with rage, yearning for vengeance--and heard sufficient of Black Bosco's conversation to learn that the slave-captain's anger was not yet satisfied, but that he was doomed to the terrible fate of being deserted on an uninhabited island.

He was helpless, so he did all that he could--lay still and listened intently.

"Well, and after you've dropped your passenger, as you call him--where to then, captain?"

"Ah, that's the best part of it. I know of such a charming little retreat--such a delightful, snug, secret rest--that would delight the eye of one of the old pirates of the main--an island surrounded, concealed even, by an archipelago of islets, so close together as almost to make a solid circle of land. There is but one entrance through this circlet of islets--at least, only one tolerably wide and safe entrance. I don't doubt but that it might be possible to find a passage through some of the others; but, as there is no such thing as map or chart, it would be very dangerous. Do you know, Pedro, that these islands are not marked down in any chart, and I believe I, alone, know of their existence.

"Have they anything to do with the Gunner's Quoin--Wedge Island.

"I think they belong to the same group, but they are not in sight. As to my particular island, it is completely hidden, for the surrounding islets, though small, have high peaks and promontories. Oh! I tell you, it is a charming retreat--just the place to hide anything, from plundered treasure to you know what."

And as he spoke, he nodded his head towards the cabin.

"Just so, captain. And you mean to make for this place

after you have dropped a passenger here? You know the latitude and longitude?"

"That's just it, and then I shall drop another passenger there. As to the latitude and longitude, it bears east south-east, about a hundred miles from this island."

"Oh, ho! I begin to see. Leave where you will know where to find—eli?"

"Just so, Pedro, and where no one else will know where to find. Every one else on a false scent. Don't you see? I have the game all in my own hands. Now I'll just rouse that cursed mulatto up, and give him a treat before he's put ashore. We're drawing up to the island fast. Go and find him, Pedro, and send him to me."

But the mutilated steward could not be found easily. He had overheard the greater part of the conversation between captain and mate, not missing that part where Black Bosco spoke of the unknown island, and its bearings from the Quoin, or Wedge Island.

Then he had completely covered himself with the old sail.

At last, however, Pedro ferreted him out, and summoned him to rise by a not too gentle kick.

"The captain wants you on the quarter-deck."

"Ten thousand curses on his ruffian soul," said the unhappy man, in low tones of intense hate. "May he burn for ever."

"Likely enough," replied Pedro, coolly, "but that's none of your business. What you've got to do now is to go aft to him and see what he wants."

The unfortunate man rose painfully, for he was very weak from pain and loss of blood, and made his way slowly aft.

"Well, my dandy steward, my charming young Don Juan, my elegant traitor, I want you to come down into the cabin with me. Pedro, see and get those things in the boat I told you of."

The mulatto bowed in silence.

He was helplessly at the mercy of this inhuman monster, and resistance or defiance on his part would, he had too good reason to fear, only entail on him fresh agonies, more mutilation."

Black Bosco unlocked the door at the top of the com-

panion stairs, and went down into the cabin followed by the ex-steward.

And when they both stood within the cabin, a strange sight presented itself to their eyes, a sight which Bosco regarded with calm unconcern, but which caused the mulatto to start back with a cry of dismay, of horror even.

At the moment they entered a female form had been crouching on the lockers aft, but the instant she perceived them, she started up and advanced half the length of the cabin to meet them.

Then she stopped abruptly, and stood with body bent forward, hands clenched behind her, and eyes gleaming with a terrible fire, and features convulsed with passion.

"Avaunt ! what want ye here ? back to the accursed regions from whence ye came ! Back, dark spirits of night, nor dare pollute the realms of day with your accursed presence. Away with ye, fiends and imps of Satan ! Away ! away, I say, ere I call forth the spirits of light ! Away," once more she cried, her voice rising almost to a shriek as she ended.

Well might the mulatto steward start in horror !

It was Giulia d'Almaviras he saw before him, the body beautiful as ever, but the mind, ah ! that was gone ; strained beyond endurance, her reason had given way, and *Giulia d'Almaviras was mad.*

But the appearance of Giulia, alive and well in bodily health, requires some explanation, after Pedro having cut the rope which kept her suspended over the sea, and which act it might be supposed must infallibly plunge her into the waves to sink to the depths of the ocean, and she miserably drowning.

CHAPTER XL.

THE UNINHABITED ISLAND.

BLACK Bosco stood leaning against a bulk-head, surveying, with a mocking smile, the wreck he had wrought.

A man mutilated.

A woman—a high-born and beautiful damsel—driven mad,

And on this fiend's work the fiend in human shape could gaze with a smile.

Giulia was as beautiful as ever. Indeed, the wildness of her eyes, the look of excitement in her flushed face, her nervous, tragic manner, seemed to lend fresh interest, even new charms, to the unhappy girl.

Her dark hair, unkempt, uncared for, flowed loose in wild disorder over her neck and shoulders, and even her dress was disarranged.

After talking in a wild, excited manner for a time, a change came over her mood, and seating herself on the after locker, she commenced singing, or rather chanting, a plaintive Spanish melody.

It seemed to go to the heart of the unhappy mulatto.

"Oh, man, if you are a man," he cried excitedly to Bosco, "and not a devil in man's shape allowed to prowl about the earth for a time, let me leave this, or I, too, shall go mad!"

Black Bosco laughed his usual mocking laugh.

"You're a fine fellow, certainly, to play the dangerous game of treason with Black Bosco. Bah! Go on deck, you chicken-hearted traitor. I have not done with you yet, I wished you to see before I finished with you that my vengeance was complete."

The mulatto went on deck without a word.

He had no hope, whatever, having overheard the fate in store for him.

Right well he knew that neither resistance nor entreaties would avail him in the least with the hard-hearted monger in whose power he was, and whose vengeance he had provoked.

Black Bosco followed him on deck, and at once saw that the boat was got ready, and provided with the slight stock of stores he had named.

They were now within a couple of miles of the island, and Black Bosco gave orders for the boat to be lowered.

"Get in!"

That was all he said to the unfortunate man whom he thus devoted to a lingering death.

The wretched mulatto was prepared for this—had nerved himself to face inevitable death—a slow, lingering death by

actual starvation, and thirst ; for, of course, the little bag of biscuits and keg of water would not last long.

He got into the boat without a word, and was quickly rowed ashore by four lusty negroes, the mate, Pedro, steering.

The biscuits, water, and stores, were put on shore, and the mulatto himself landed.

Then the boat shoved off, and he was left alone. He stood watching it as it sped over the waves in gloomy silence. Once he raised his clenched left hand aloft, as though invoking the vengeance of heaven on the cruel wretch who had doomed him to such a fate, and then quietly lay down by his little pile of stores.

Even the rough, brutal negroes forming the crew of the boat felt a shade of compunction for a fellow-creature thus left to perish.

And Pedro, the mate, who was a timid villain, shuddered as he thought of the terrible curse which doubtless the mulatto had invoked upon the heads of himself and Bosco.

The boat reached the ship, and was hoisted up, and the *Vendetta* steamed away. And as she put out to sea, the mulatto was seen to rise again on his feet, and again uplift his clenched left hand.

Then he knelt, and they knew he was praying.

Then again he rose, and held his only hand above his head.

And they knew he was cursing them.

Curses—prayer—curses—a strange mixture.

But somehow, Black Bosco, who was seldom moved by anything, was evidently uneasy.

It seemed as if the curses from afar off of the mulatto had been able to produce some sensible effect on him.

In spite of himself a cold shudder went through his iron frame, and this man of many murders actually felt something akin to compunction.

He even felt a something, he knew not what, which prompted him to return and take the marooned man off the island.

But this he effectually resisted, laughed at his folly, drank off a tumbler of *aguardiente*, and ordered the engineer to fire up.

But what of Giulia d'Almaviras ?

Miraculously almost saved from the jaws of death only to be received in the scarce less dreadful embrace of madness, hers was indeed an unhappy fate.

After the Yankee captain had left the ship, Black Bosco did not have occasion for nearly an hour to go down the cabin, as he busied himself giving directions for the repair of the rudder.

He at length went down and Pedro too, both thinking, of course, that the unhappy girl lately imprisoned there was now a corpse, deep down in the sea.

Bosco started suddenly, and pointing up to the ring-bolt in the beam through which the rope led, exclaimed—

“ Why, there's part of the rope.”

Pedro was speechless with astonishment.

Looking out at the stern cabin window, they beheld the cabinet in which the girl was confined, dangling in mid air, the foot of it dipping at times in the top of the waves.

In a few moments they had understood all.

Pedro had cut the rope instantly on hearing the signal as arranged.

But as it happened, by some means or another there was a large knot in the rope, and this, with some kinks, had jammed in the ring-bolt, and thus stopped the rope running through, and the further descent of the cabinet to the sea.

Giulia had felt herself shoot downwards, grating against the edge of the port, and thinking her last moment come, had screamed, and fainted.

They hoisted her up, and found her insensible.

After many hours she recovered consciousness so far as the power of motion was concerned, but her mind was gone.

She was perfectly delirious—for the time mad.

Nor is it to be wondered at, considering the terrible ordeal she had undergone, for had she not suffered all the bitterness of death, even up to the last supreme second ?

CHAPTER XLI.

TIDINGS OF GIULIA D'ALMAVIRAS.

LET us hie away back from the *Vendetta*, with her cruel

captain and her murderous doings, to the pursuing and avenging *Avenger*, where, as yet, at least, all is peace and quietness.

It is evening—the sun is just dipping between the horizon, and the two steamers, the *Avenger* and the United States frigate, *Rapidan* (the same the smoke of which was seen in the morning by the look-out of the *Avenger*) have approached each other almost within hail.

In ten minutes the boat was lowered and manned, and Jack O'Brien seating himself in the stern-sheets, gave the word—

“ Give way ! ”

In a very few minutes he was alongside the Yankee frigate, and going on board, was received at the gangway by the captain, who forthwith invited him into the cabin.

“ I signalled you to come on board, mister,” said the Yankee, “ for a rather peculiar reason. I’ve got a message from the sea, and am requested to pass it on.”

“ A message from the sea ? ” said Jack O’Brien.

“ Yes ; in a bottle.”

“ In a bottle ! I’m all in a fog ! ”

“ It’s easily explained. The look-out, two days ago, reported seeing corked bottles floating on the sea at pretty regular intervals. I ordered a boat to be lowered, and we picked up two. They each contained a paper, with an inscription the same on each. Here is the paper, I will read you what is written on it.”

He then proceeded to read what Giulia d’Almaviras had written :—

“ Help ! help ! in the name of the Virgin, help. I, Giulia de Cor-dova d’Almaviras, daughter of the Marquis d’Almaviras, have been treacherously abducted from Havannah—at the instigation of a villainous Englishman—by a scoundrel capable of any atrocity, known as Capitano Bosco Negro. The vessel is being steered for an island in the Caribbean sea, in longitude — W. exactly, for what purpose I know not. All this I have ascertained beyond doubt. For the love of the Virgin, help ! ”

“ By all the gods ! ” cried Jack O’Brien, starting to his feet, “ that’s the very affair we’re after. I must be off back to my ship with the news.”

" Give way with a will, lads ! " cried the lieutenant of the *Avenger*, so soon he had taken his place in the stern-sheets of the boat ; " pull like blazes."

He was burning with excitement, eager to communicate his news to Edward Blake.

" By Jove ! old boy, this is fortunate ! It's the hand-writing of Giulia d'Almaviras herself ! " exclaimed Blake.

" And of course her information is to be depended upon."

" It in a measure corroborates my own knowledge, and yet does not altogether agree. The place she speaks of in this paper can scarcely be the same I overheard Black Bosco speak of. At all events, it conclusively proves that at present we are on the right track—that the intention is to convey her to some secluded island in the Caribbean Sea. Of that there can be no doubt. For the present, Jack, we will alter the course a point more to the northward, in accordance with the latitude and longitude on the paper in Giulia's hand-writing. We will see what that brings forth, and should we discover no trace of her, or of the vessel in which she was carried off, we can go back to our original intention, and make for Wedge Island."

The course was duly altered, and after saluting the frigate, the *Avenger* sped on her way.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE AVENGER.

THE *Avenger* was well found and equipped in every respect.

A short time before the abduction of Giulia d'Almaviras, a blockade runner, in endeavouring to escape from a pursuing Federal cruiser, ran ashore on one of the reefs near Havana, and became a total wreck.

Amongst other cargo she had a large field cannon, a muzzle-loader, and twelve breech-loading Armstrongs of the best construction, and adapted either for firing a conical solid shot or shell.

These, though light and easily handled, were of long range, and capable of doing terrible execution in action by reason of the rapidity and accuracy of their fire,

They were intended for field batteries for the Confederates, but would answer admirably mounted as ship guns.

They had carriages, ammunition, and all complete.

The great wealth of the Marquis d'Almavira enabled him to purchase these costly and deadly engines of war.

He did so, and at once sent them on board his beautiful yacht, which he had placed at the disposal of Edward Blake.

A supply of coals and provisions were sent on board with equal promptitude, and there only remained to get a crew and equip her for sea.

The marquis transferred her to the name of Edward Blake, and had her registered under the British flag.

The young captain himself took in hand the task of getting a crew, and as there were at that time a good many English and American seamen ashore in Havannah, he was able to obtain a crew about one half English, Scotch, and Irish, and the remainder Americans, Dutch, Swedes, and Danes.

Most of the stokers were niggers, but he was able to get English engineers.

By the time the *Avenger* approached the islands of the Caribbean Sea, all hands had had a turn at the big gun exercise, and a very fair degree of discipline had been arrived at.

She steered easily under sail or steam, and for speed was a veritable clipper. The Armstrong guns were wonders of deadly accuracy, and the gunners worked them with ease and rapidity.

Altogether everthing looked most favourable, and Edward Blake could not but be thoroughly satisfied and hopeful.

All that was wanted was to come across the enemy with the girl in his power. Of the result of the encounter the young commander had no doubt, if it came to a fight between the two ships.

Should he, however, succeed in putting her ashore and fortifying some rocky position, the affair might be more serious, but under any circumstances, Blake felt persuaded that he should return to Havannah in triumph.

This was the state of affairs when, two days after their falling in with the Yankee frigate, they approached some of islands of the Caribbean Sea.

The British Island of Jamaica had long been passed, and the next land sighted was Martinique, between which and Barbadoes, the swift steamer glided under sail and steam.

On the two days previous to this, a slight accident to the machinery made it necessary to stop the engines for twelve hours.

This was a serious loss of time, as the breeze being very light, the *Avenger* was able to make but very little progress under sail.

So that even allowing the *Avenger* to steam and sail faster than the *Vendetta*, the latter would be enabled by this delay to make up all losses, and have as good a start as when she sailed from Cuba.

Thus then, unless the *Avenger* should greatly outpace the *Vendetta*, there was every chance of Black Bosco's vessel getting first to the goal, supposing, as Captain Blake had every reason to do, that the information conveyed to him by Giulia's own handwriting was correct, and that the slave-captain intended to leave the lady on an island far away from the track of ships, where there would be little chance of her being discovered, but where he could put his hand on her at any time he chose.

Aware of this, Ned Blake did not stint the furnaces of coal, nor did he spare the engines, but kept them going at the highest possible pressure of steam.

Also he crowded on every possible stitch of sail. The swift little steamer dashed through the waves at the rate sometimes of twelve knots an hour.

On the morning of the eighth day after leaving Havannah, he calculated by observation that he was only some fifty or sixty miles distant from the spot Giulia had mentioned on the slip of paper which had fallen into his hands.

In order to make the shortest possible course to this island or group of islands, he had altered his original course, and did not pass within sight of the latitude and longitude where he judged Wedge Island to be—the island he had first heard Black Bosco speak of as the one to which he would convey the abducted girl.

On this eighth day he caused a vigilant look-out to be kept, and shortly after noon the cry—

"Land-ho!" was heard from the mast-head.

The wind was fair, the sea smooth, and the vessel made such splendid way, that in less than four hours she was close up with a group of small islands, which appeared to spread out in a semi-circular form.

Sailing to the east, then to the south, and then bearing to the west, and lastly to the north, Blake circum-navigated this group before dark, carefully inspecting all the islands as he did so.

But he could discover no sign of the island he sought.

By none of the indications on the paper written in Giulia's own hand, could he discover the spot where she at least felt confident she was to be put ashore.

And yet he was quite certain that so far as her directions were concerned he was in the right latitude and longitude.

Night coming on he hove the vessel to, standing off and on.

The next day he renewed the search again, making a complete circuit of the group, but without any success.

And the next day he commenced a more minute search still, lowering boats and landing on many of the islets.

And so on, day after day, until a week had been spent.

And yet not a sign of life, nothing pointing in the remotest way to human beings ever having landed on any of these islands.

He now began to suspect that there must be some mistake in Giulia's data, and finally he resolved to sail away from this group, and endeavour to find Wedge Island, of which he had overheard Black Bosco speak.

He had no doubt of being able to find this if Bosco had given the latitude and longitude correctly, for he had heard every word distinctly, and knew he could trust his memory.

And so after a week's search without discovering the slightest trace of Giulia d'Almaviras or her abductors, Edward Blake sailed away, for the time discomfited.

But, nevertheless, this was the group of which Black Bosco had spoken to Pedro the mate, when the unfortunate mulatto steward overheard him, and among these islets was the one which he so extolled as admirably suited for a pirate's retreat.

And, moreover, at that very moment, as the *Avenger* put

out to sea, Giulia d'Almaviras was languishing a solitary prisoner on the island.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THERE LAY THE DEAD BODY OF A MAN.

IT may well be supposed that this first and partial failure had somewhat of a dispiriting effect on Edward Blake, and even on his light-hearted lieutenant, Jack O'Brien.

The captain of the *Avenger* was now really the more hopeful of the two ; for though O'Brien talked cheerfully, and declared they were sure to win in the long run, his faith was a little bit shaken by their non-success.

Captain Blake looked on the matter in this light—

The girl had seized an opportunity of writing what she thought she knew for certain, corking up in bottles, and committing to the sea. She had been mistaken, perhaps, in some matter apparently trifling, but which would be quite sufficient to throw them out entirely in their reckoning, and had done so.

Nevertheless, it bore this encouragement. It showed that a short time back she was alive and well in these seas, and, as he thought, in the hands of Black Bosco, who at that time was steering a course for the island, the latitude and longitude of which Blake had himself heard him state.

Not finding any signs of him where they had been, the probability was that the girl had been entirely mistaken, and that the slave captain had adhered to his original intention.

This was the conclusion Edward Blake had come to, and though, perhaps, not so sanguine as before, he had well-grounded hopes of finding things as he expected.

The one incontrovertible fact, which he thought prophesied best for their success, was this, that Black Bosco had carried the girl down towards the Caribbean Sea, where the island to which he had first spoken of conveying her was situated. And, bearing this in mind, Blake determined he would not give up the search so long as coal and provisions lasted.

As for the former, now that great speed was no longer an object, he carefully husbanded, depending principally on the excellent sailing qualities of the vessel.

“Land-ho!” is heard once again from the mast-head, and in an hour or two more islands are seen ahead, and presently, to the young commander’s great satisfaction, he is enabled to single out one particular island.

On landing on the coast of Wedge Island, the prospect was not at first encouraging.

There was sand up to high-water mark, and then rough rocks and bowlders, covered with seaweed and moss.

Captain Blake had organized an exploring party of ten, including himself and O’Brien.

On landing, he directed them to penetrate inland, keeping within hail of each other, and at a distance apart of about three hundred yards, marching in directions parallel to the line of the shore.

On any one discovering anything worth notice, he was to fire off his musket, which each one carried.

Blake himself was rowed slowly along within about fifty yards of the shore.

Scarce half an hour had elapsed when he was startled by the sound of a musket-shot.

“Give way, lads!” he cried, steering the boat towards the shore; “they have found something.”

In a very few minutes he had made his way to the spot whence came the report of the musket, and arrived amidst an excited group, breathless and panting.

And there a strange and terrible sight met his eyes.

At the foot of a huge rock there was a sort of natural hollow or cave.

At the mouth of this there was the remains of a fire—some half-burned sticks and dead embers.

This was the first thing he noticed, and was sufficient, of course, to convince him that the place had been visited by human beings—or at least one.

At first he did not observe the object on which all regards were bent.

In the shadow of the cave or hollow there lay the dead body of a man,

It was on its back, the head resting on the remains of a bag of biscuits.

The right arm, from the elbow upwards, was swathed in bloody bandages, and, looking more closely, Blake could tell that the hand was gone.

The body was clothed in shirt and trousers only, and, from the appearance, it did not seem that death had taken place more than a couple of days since at most.

There was in the cave a coil of rope, an axe, a musket, a few tools, some old canvas, and, by the head of the corpse, paper, and a bottle of ink, with the pen still in it. Also there was a small keg which had probably contained water, but was now empty.

As we have said, the body lay on its back, with its glassy blind eyes staring vacantly upwards.

The left hand held a paper—a sheet of foolscap paper—covered with an almost illegible scrawl.

Edward Blake stooped down, and took it from the hand of the corpse.

He glanced at it, and as he deciphered the first few words, written in a clumsy, irregular, scrawling hand, he started, and a slight exclamation escaped him.

"Whoever finds this let him read it through. I was steward on board the *Vendetta*, and have been murdered by her captain, Il Bosco Negro."

* * * * *

"Dig a grave for the corpse," said Captain Blake, "some of you. In two hours' time I will come and read the burial service."

Then he strolled down to the sea coast, and seating himself in view of the vessel, proceeded to read this message from the dead.

Edward Blake stopped reading, and, rising, walked rapidly to and fro, grinding his teeth.

"Mad! mad! That wretch, then, has driven her mad! Can such things be? Can heaven allow such a monster to live? But when we meet, I will have no mercy on him, not even the form of a trial shall he have, but the death of a dog then and there."

After a bit Ned Blake calmed down a little, and resumed

reading the manuscript, which was by no means an easy task.

On finishing perusing it, he rose, and walked up and down for a few minutes in deep thought.

"Yes, it must be so ; the island here spoken of is actually among that group which I thought we had so thoroughly searched. With this additional information we cannot fail to find it, and perhaps may not only rescue the marquis's daughter, but catch Black Bosco like a rat in a trap."

His mind was quickly made up.

Having given the unfortunate mulatto steward, so cruelly doomed to a terrible death, the rites of Christian burial, they returned to the vessel, and in another hour the *Avenger* was sailing before a fair wind, back to the islands in the Caribbean Sea she had left but a day before.

CHAPTER XLIV

WEDGE ISLAND.

THE human mind is a wonderfully constituted machine, if such a term may be used, of the thinking, reasoning part of man.

Insanity—that foul and mysterious disease—no better understood now than two thousand years ago—makes its approach in various ways.

The worst and most deadly form is when it comes on gradually—by slow degrees. The patient is often aware of the impending calamity, and fights desperately against it.

And again, it swoops down on the victim suddenly, without a moment's warning.

This is usually the effect of some terrible shock on an already overstrained mind.

This was the case with Giulia d'Almaviras. Already in the agonies of suspense, deadly terror had done its work ; and when Pedro cut the rope, and she felt herself slipping, as she thought, to her death, the thin thread of reason snapped, and with one short cry her thinking soul fled away.

Perhaps it was better so, for she was no longer conscious of pain or misery.

But, as often happens, this state was not destined to last.

After exhausting herself utterly by her wild ravings and rapid motion to and fro in the cabin, the unfortunate girl grew all at once drowsy, and lying on the bare, hard lockers, fell off into a deep sleep, which lasted for many hours.

And when she awoke her reason had returned.

She was, however, utterly oblivious of all that had occurred after the cutting of the rope by Pedro.

She had no knowledge of Bosco, accompanied by Gonzalvo, the mutilated steward, having been down in the cabin—no recollection whatever of her ravings and wild fancies.

She knew that something had occurred which had prevented her being plunged into the sea, but as to how or in what manner she had been saved from this terrible death she was in utter ignorance.

She distinctly remembered the *Vendetta* being chased and ultimately overhauled by a large war ship, but what was the result when she was boarded and searched, she knew not.

The man-of-war was no longer in sight, and the vessel was speeding on her course unmolested—that was all she knew on the subject.

Some days after the *Vendetta* had been overhauled by the Yankee frigate, she might have been seen cautiously steaming through a narrow channel which ran between two of a group of islands. And presently, after threading a maze-like course in and out among many islands—for the most part barren, rugged, and rocky—a lovely bay, of horseshoe shape, opened out before her.

The shore was covered with white sand, and at a distance of some hundred yards from the beach luxuriant vegetation commenced.

At first it was only brush, undergrowth, and a species of long grass, but gradually the aspect of the island, which sloped upwards in regular gradation from the beach, partook more of the nature of forest.

About three-fourths of the distance of the mountain there was a platform or table land, from which a clear view could be commanded of the coast and bay beneath.

This plateau could be approached from the side of the bay by a sort of natural zig-zag path, which wound up from the shore.

On the other side the flat expanse grew narrower and narrower, until it merged into a mere ledge, not half a yard wide, and quite insufficient to afford safe footing for either man or beast.

So that any one installed on this plateau could command a clear view of the bay, and of course perceive any vessel or boat approaching, as also any person ascending the mountain—or, rather, hill.

On the other hand, the part of the plateau fading away into a scarcely distinguishable ledge, would render the occupant secure against surprise.

All things considered, it was a position admirably adapted for a look-out, to guard against surprise, as also for defence.

Nature had done much for this place ; but Black Bosco, who had selected the island, and notably this eagle's nest, as a safe retreat, and hiding-place, if necessary, had done more.

So soon as the *Vendetta* had cast anchor in the bay, he himself landed, and, with a working party of a dozen men, laden with tools and blasting powder, ascended the mountain to this natural plateau.

Forthwith he proceeded to excavate a cave in the solid mountain, which at that part was very rocky.

By means of the blasting powder he detached huge masses of solid rock, and then by means of levers rolled them to the edge of the plateau, so as to form a solid breast-work.

Some of these he so disposed that they could be rolled down on any man or body of men approaching the position from the shore.

The havoc which one such mass of rock would create as it went thundering down the mountain slope, may perhaps be imagined, scarcely described.

At the entrance to the cave he caused a sort of tent, made of tarpaulins, to be erected.

The rampart of rocks, however, all along the edge of the natural platform, was of such a height and so disposed as to conceal both cave and tent.

They were so arranged also as to show no signs of human handiwork. Any one looking up at this plateau from the shore or the bay would fancy that the rampart of rocks, purposely built up rugged and irregular, was a natural one.

To this place, then, Giulia d'Almaviras was conducted.

Black Bosco informed her in a very few words that this would be her abode for the future, and counselled her to make herself as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

"As for escape, that is impossible, as you can plainly see. And as to your succeeding in corrupting any of your guardians, my servants—as was the case with Gonzalvo, the mulatto—I will take ample precautions against that. You may, if you will, plot treachery with the sea birds. You shall not have the opportunity of doing so with any living man—for I shall leave you here alone, well assured that when I want you I shall find you. The existence of this island is known only to me, and here you will remain in perfect seclusion and safety, until my plans are ripe for execution. I leave you food and stores of all kinds, and two large hogsheads of water, which will, if necessary, suffice you for months.

"You have no boat, no means of leaving this island, and I advise you to submit quietly to your fate. Violence, entreaties, and efforts to escape, will all prove equally useless, of that rest assured. And now I leave you to your own desires."

Black Bosco lit a cigarette, and strolled leisurely down the mountain slope.

He embarked in the boat, and went on board the vessel with the utmost apparent unconcern.

Then the anchor was weighed, the engines started, and the *Vendetta* steamed away, leaving our heroine, Giulia, alone on this desolate island.

Alone—absolutely alone!

CHAPTER XLV

ALONE ON THE ISLAND.

BUT for the sense of desolation—the knowledge of being absolutely alone in this place—Giulia d'Almauiras might have been tolerably contented and easy in mind on the island.

She subsided into a state of quiet melancholy ; and on the second day seemed to have resigned herself to her fate, to have given up all hope of escape.

But presently a reaction came, and a restless craving to look into the future took possession of her.

She thought and pondered, and many conjectures arose in her mind.

“ For what fate am I destined ? Why have I been thus torn away from my home and friends, and by whom ? ”

This was the question constantly before her, and, alas ! she could imagine no favourable answer.

“ The Englishman, Blake, is the author of the outrage,” she said to herself. “ The villain, Bosco, is but his hired agent. And his reason for this infamous outrage ? ”

She had started to her feet, and burning with rage and indignation at the shameful thought, stood with clenched hands, flushed cheeks, gleaming eyes—an enraged tigress, beautiful in her anger.

Instinctively her hand sought her bosom, where she had carried the little stiletto of which Bosco had deprived her.

“ Ah, my dagger is gone ! ” said Giulia. “ No matter ; there are other means of seeking escape in death.”

She walked to the edge of the rampart of stones, climbing up to the top so as to command a view of the bay and mountain slope.

“ A leap from here—would that bring death ? Uncertain. It might, or might not. I must devise a more sure means. A plunge into the water of the bay. I might be rescued, and compelled to live against my will—live to be the creature—the slave of the villain who planned my abduction. No, that will not do. A knife—a swift stab to the

heart—that is the only sure escape through the gate of death."

But she had no knife capable of inflicting even a dangerous wound. Two had been left, but they were blunt, and rounded instead of pointed.

Nevertheless, Giulia's woman's wit came to her aid, and she bethought her that it was possible for her to sharpen one of these knives—to grind it to a point even enough to penetrate to her heart.

So she set about it, and, with steady perseverance, commenced, and sustained her task of turning a blunt table-knife into a sharp-pointed dagger.

There was no lack of hard, rough stones ; and selecting one of these she thought suitable to her purpose, she commenced grinding away, using all her strength, and not relaxing her efforts till, after several hours' work, sheer exhaustion compelled her to rest.

Her beautiful arms, unused to such labour, ached terribly, and her delicate hands were blistered and sore.

Still she never thought of giving up, and after a brief rest returned with unflinching courage and determination to her self-imposed task.

It took her two whole days, and then her hands were in such a state that it would have been impossible for her to have worked any more.

But the task was accomplished, and she found herself in possession of a keen-pointed, double-edged knife, by means of which she could defend herself, and, as a last resort, escape from a fate worse than death by stabbing herself to the heart.

She made a little sheath of canvas for this deadly little weapon of her own manufacture, and never was jewel prized by lady or miser more than was this double-edged, sharp-pointed knife.

Having accomplished this result, she felt more at her ease, and resolved to make a survey of the island—to explore it, in fact.

"For," she argued, "it is possible that from another part I may command a more extensive prospect, a view of the open sea, and not merely of the bay, as is the case here.

And if I can see the open ocean, ships sailing by may be able to see a signal, a flag, or beacon fire which I may contrive, and discovering that there is a human creature on the island, may come and rescue me."

Filled with this idea, Giulia descended from her eagle's nest on the mountain, and not without difficulty, made her way down the steep and rugged natural path to the seashore.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SURVEY OF THE ISLAND.

IT is strange what trifling things will have great effect on the human mind and spirits ; how little it takes to lift a man or a woman from despondency to hopefulness, from helpless, despairing resignation to what seems inevitable fate, to cheerful, persistent, and vigorous effort.

It was so with Giulia d'Almaviras.

She had conjured up a hideous phantom—a monster which crushed her heart and completely robbed her of spirits and energy.

She had definitely decided in her own mind, quite wrongly as the reader knows, that Edward Blake was the instigator of her abduction, that he was her deadly enemy, that she was in his power, and that any day he might come to seize his victim.

And the thought weighed on her mind like some terrible incubus.

But when the happy idea struck her of providing a knife for her defence, and also as a means of escape from her enemy through the dreadful gate of death, and she had actually carried it out, then there came a complete revulsion of feeling.

The idea of hoisting a signal of some sort by day, and lighting a beacon-fire by night, had taken firm possession of her mind. She did not stay to think what sort of a signal she could hoist, so as to be seen afar off, nor how she could set about getting dry wood enough to build a big bonfire every night.

Her sole thought was to explore the island, and discover a spot from which there was a better view than where she at present was.

She thought that she might remove sufficient provisions from her present place of abode to last her some time, and also hoped to erect a tent, or contrive a shelter of some kind.

And then there came to her a happy thought.

Not only might she find a spot whence she could make signals to vessels out at sea to come to her rescue, but also she might perhaps be fortunate enough to conceal herself from Bosco and the Englishman, Blake, who doubtless would come, expecting to find her.

The more she considered her position the more hopeful she grew.

She felt quite certain that her father would send vessels in search of the piratical ship in which she had been carried off.

It did not occur to her that possibly the marquis might be in total ignorance of the fact that she had been carried off to sea.

However, she decided in her own mind that vessels even at that time were in search of her, and thought she had every reason to hope they would discover this island, and learn by her signals that there was some human being on it.

She had great faith in the success of her scheme with the bottles and paper enclosed, little thinking that an error she had made in her statement must have the effect of misleading anybody who should pick up one of the bottles and seek, by the instructions, to discover this island.

Nor was she aware how almost completely it was encircled and hidden by numerous islets, many of them with high peaks and promontories.

She had made up her mind that she would be sought for and found ; and having resolved to set off on an exploring tour of the island, at once proceeded to put her intention in progress.

She was very thoughtful and shrewd in making her preparations ; indeed, no one who knew her previous life

how her every want was almost anticipated by one or other of a swarm of servants and slaves, would ever have given her credit for so much ingenuity and forethought as she displayed in this affair.

She saw the inconvenience of her long-skirted dress, and, indeed, that it would be scarcely possible to climb rugged heights, and make her way through thicket and scrub thus encumbered.

So she set to work, and soon rigged herself out in a decidedly picturesque costume, in which her limbs would be free, and she would not have yards of silk clinging about her feet and dragging behind her.

She cut off her silk robe above the knees, and with the lower part made a pair of oriental trousers, which fastened about six inches above the ankles.

Then, with some canvas, she made a pair of gaiters, or mocassins, to protect her feet and lower part of the leg.

The loose sleeves of her dress she also cut off at the elbows, and instead of the loose body made a tight-fitting bodice.

And finding among the miscellaneous assortment of articles Bosco had left ~~some~~ black velvet, she made herself a cloak, which, when not wanting to wear, she could roll up tightly and carry over her shoulder, as cavalry soldiers carry their blankets, and which cloak of thick, warm velvet would, on occasion, serve excellently for a rug and wrapper in which to sleep.

For provisions she took enough biscuit and dried fish to suffice for three or four days, and also a small keg of water, which she carried strapped over her shoulder *à la vivandière*.

Just as she was ready to start she made an important and most fortunate discovery.

She had puzzled a good deal as to how she should cut wood in order to make a beacon-fire.

For she saw that in case she could find a good look-out point, and from thence should discover a vessel towards the close of the day, her only way of attracting discovery would be by lighting a big fire.

And it fell out that in one of the bags of biscuit which

Black Bosco had left she found a small hatchet, such as the bushmen of Australia call a tomahawk, the handle about a foot long, and weighing altogether not more than two pounds.

This she carried at her left side suspended to a belt she had made. A bag of biscuit and dried salt fish, packed as tightly as possible, she carried slung over her right shoulder, a small keg of water on her right side, and her velvet cloak tightly rolled up, completed her equipment, except her self-made knife, which she affectionately and carefully kept concealed in the bosom of her bodice.

Thus accoutred, Giulia d'Almaviras set forth from her mountain dwelling, and clambering over the rampart of rock, descended the mountain side.

No one to have seen her, agile and graceful as a chamois, springing from rock to rock without a falter or stumble, attired and equipped in such an extravagant and picturesque fashion, would ever have recognized in this wild-looking island damsel the proud and haughty Havannah beauty—the star of Andalusia, as she was called.

Having reached the sea-shore, she at once proceeded to skirt the eastern side of the bay, and presently, striking across a sandy spit of land, saw before her a long line of coast, cleft at intervals with inlets and little bays.

Inland about a quarter of a mile from the sea she saw a line of bluffs, in the almost perpendicular sides of which was an abundance of dark green foliage.

At once she perceived that these were inaccessible, so continued her course along the coast, being frequently obliged to strike inland for half a mile to get round the numerous inlets, or, as the Americans would say, bayous.

The walking was excellent, the sea being lined by a broad strip of firm white sand.

When night came on she found her hatchet of inestimable value. With it she cut some dead branches, collected some dry leaves, and made a fire close at the foot of one of the steep cliffs.

Here, after a supper of biscuit, water, and dried fish, she rolled herself up in her cloak, and was soon fast asleep.

A strange couch truly for the daughter of the Marquis

d'Almaviras, the loveliest lady and richest heiress in Cuba.

But Giulia slept soundly, inspirited by the strong hope she had of effecting her escape from the toils of the villains who had ensnared her.

And the prospect was all the brighter and sweeter from the thought that if she were rescued, it would be in great measure owing to her own courage and exertions.

How often are such bright hopes and anticipations rudely dashed to the ground ! Will it be so in the case of Giulia d'Almaviras ? Time will show.

CHAPTER XLVII.

GIULIA EXAMINES THE SIGNAL.

ON getting back to the spot from whence she started, she thought, at a first glance, everything looked exactly as when she left the place. It was not so, however.

Something white, and with quick, uncertain motion, caught her eye.

At first she thought it was some wild bird by the fluttering sort of movement.

But then, as she looked more keenly, she perceived that though there was motion, the white object kept always exactly in the same place.

It could not be a bird in the air, for no bird would remain so entirely motionless, merely fluttering its wings.

And then it dawned upon her that it was a small flag of some kind.

"A flag ! yes, a flag ! Some one has been there, and it is hoisted as a signal !" she cried, and instantly started off, almost at a run—bounding over the level ground which formed the shore of the bay like an antelope.

But presently she stopped suddenly.

"Yes, a flag ! a signal ! it is true !" she said to herself ; "but what does it mean ? who is the man, or men, who planted it there ? friend or enemy ? Perhaps it indicates

the return of Bosco. Perhaps the arrival of Blake, the insolent Englishman, who caused me to be abducted."

This was a dilemma, and the fair island prisoner knew not how to act.

If the flag signified the return of Bosco, she would be rushing right into the fowler's net, should she make her way to the eagle's nest (the name she had given the platform on the mountain).

But then she thought that Bosco would not be likely to hoist a flag.

His course, knowing that she could scarcely have escaped from the island, would be, on missing her, to institute a search ; and finally she decided that it was far more likely to be a signal hoisted by some one who had landed from the vessel she had caught a glimpse of—a signal intended for her, to inform her that her rescuers had come to her aid.

At all events, she could do no good by remaining where she was, and then came the sweet consciousness of the possession of a weapon, and drawing forth the sharp-pointed, keen-bladed little knife she had herself sharpened and shaped, she gazed at it with affectionate regard.

"Here, at least, I possess a means of eluding my enemies. I can defend myself, and should the worst happen, and resistance be no longer possible, I can still defy the villainous Englishman. I can escape, and save myself from dishonour and degradation, by means of one swift blow with this little weapon. Fortune, befriend me," she added aloud, "I shall go and see what yonder signal portends."

She started up the mountain path, and in less than an hour was close at the foot of the rampart of rock which went round the platform.

To her surprise she saw a man ; he was not fifty yards off, and she had no difficulty in recognizing him at a glance—Edward Blake, the Englishman who had caused her to be abducted.

This was a shock indeed, and for a moment or so she was utterly unnerved.

She saw him, and he saw her, for he at once quickened his pace, and shouted out—

"Ah ! senorita, at last I have found you !"

"Villain! wretch!" she cried. "If you dare come up here, I will kill you!"

And with that, knife in hand, she sprang down again on to the platform of the eagle's nest, determined to defend herself to the last, and then, if need be, seek refuge in the arms of grim death.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

GIULIA AND BLAKE MEET ONCE MORE.

FOR a moment or two she was incapable of acting, or even thinking, but stood facing the rampart, knife in hand, panting and with flashing eyes.

When she could collect her thoughts, she tried to realize the situation.

There was her enemy, the man who had planned her abduction, and caused it to be carried out, come to seize his prey.

There could be no reasonable doubt of it, for she had seen Black Bosco's vessel, the *Vendetta*, in which she had been carried off.

Presently she heard sounds as of some one scrambling up to the barrier of rocks. It seemed that not knowing the easiest path, he was making his way up as best he could.

This aroused her to the necessity of action, and with face filled with fierce determination, she ran to the part of the ramparts where she thought he was coming, and looked over.

All at once she thought of a plan for defending herself and destroying her enemy.

She had no compunction as to the latter, for believing he was the man she had most to fear in the world, her most deadly enemy—she felt that she would be thoroughly justified in bringing about his death.

She remembered that before Bosco left, in the course of building the parapet, he had placed a number of rocks of different sizes in such positions that they could be dislodged with comparatively little force, and made to fall over the edge, when, of course, they would go bounding and thumping down the hillside, crushing and killing any living thing with which they came in contact.

Giulia beheld Edward Blake within a yard or two of the base of her citadel. He was still climbing up, and once he got a footing on the rocks, would be on the platform in half a minute.

Without a moment's hesitation, she tried several great rocks on the top of the parapet, and found that she could move them all sufficiently to cause them to topple over.

Then she judged with her eye which one was most certain to fall upon Blake as he came straight.

Having decided this to her satisfaction, she suddenly leaped up on the rocks, and revealed herself to the approaching foe.

"Hold!" she cried, "and before you advance another step, hear what I have to say."

He stopped, and looked in wondering admiration at the lovely and picturesquc figure on the top of the rampart.

Giulia did not speak for a moment or two—she was thinking what she should say—how she could secure her own safety, and yet avoid the necessity of killing this man.

For, spite of her indignation against him, and the hatred in which she held him, or thought she did, her woman's nature prevailed, her woman's heart shrank from the thought of being the immediate cause of any human being's death, even that of her worst enemy.

"I wish you would not come near me, and, moreover, I wish you to swear by all you hold sacred, that you will leave me, will not seek to molest me any more. If you refuse, if you endeavour to scale these rocks, I will kill you instantly. Do not doubt my determination or my power to do so. I can kill you at any moment I choose."

Edward Blake was utterly astonished at this speech on the part of Giulia d'Almaviras. He thought, not unnaturally, that she would be only too glad to see him, and would recognize the fact that she was now saved from the hands of Black Bosco and Don Jose.

That she should receive him as an enemy, and threaten his life, was utterly unaccountable.

He gazed at her for some time in silence, and took in every particular of her dress and appearance.

At first he thought she must be mad; but although, as the

reader knows, her senses had once given way for a time, she was quite sane and sensible, and this was apparent. Although she was obviously greatly excited, there was no tinge of madness in her manner or speech.

He observed, too, that she had no weapon in her hand, and as the small knife she had pointed and sharpened was concealed in the bosom of her dress, she appeared to be unarmed.

"Senorita," he said presently, "you take me quite by surprise. This is not the reception I expected. I cannot understand it. I come as a friend, after having, with great trouble, tracked you down to the spot where the villains who abducted you had taken you, and you receive me as an enemy."

Giulia was a little staggered by these words, but after a moment's thought she said to herself—

"He seeks to take me off my guard, to deceive me by soft words; but I am not to be so ensnared."

"I tell you, Senor Edward Blake, that I know all; know that it was at your instigation that I was abducted, that Bosco is in your pay, and that you employed him to carry out your cowardly, treacherous scheme; but I will foil you yet. There is a Providence above which watches over and protects the weak and the innocent against such wretches as you."

This tirade, and the accusations she levelled against him, almost took the young man's breath away.

"Senorita," he cried, "you are wrong, utterly wrong, mistaken entirely. What could have put it into your head that I was the cause of your abduction?"

"Ha! ha! That is good, and perhaps, senor, as you say that you are not the cause of my abduction, had no complicity in it even, you may know who is the chief villain in this infamous affair."

"Yes, I do know," he replied quietly.

Giulia now felt her curiosity excited.

"His name, the name of this traitor and villain, my most bitter enemy!"

"Don Jose de Malatesta!"

"Ah!"

Giulia gave vent to a cry, and was for a moment quite taken aback, unable to speak.

She was staggered by the words and quiet manner of the Englishman, for after all there was a possibility of Don Jose committing such an outrage.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"ONE STEP MORE, AND YOU'RE A DEAD MAN."

EDWARD BLAKE was on good ground, having gained the top of a flat rock, and now stood with folded arms waiting the effect of his words.

He fully expected that he would be believed when he thus clearly and boldly stated the truth.

As to her saying the *Vendetta* was in the bay, he concluded that was a mistake on her part, and that it was his own ship, the *Avenger*, she had seen.

But she, on her part, was quite certain that she had seen the *Vendetta*, for she recognized a peculiarity she had noticed as she was leaving Bosco's vessel to be put ashore on the island.

This was a big hole high up in the funnel, caused by a shot when she was pursued by the frigate, and that shot-hole she had recognized in the vessel which she had seen come slowly steaming into the bay, then stop suddenly, and back astern out of sight again behind the promontory.

That vessel was the *Vendetta*, she felt perfectly sure.

And she reasoned to herself thus—

"He has certainly lied in this instance. He said the *Vendetta* was not in the bay. I have seen the *Vendetta*.

"A lie!

"He said, moreover, that Don Jose de Malatesta was the instigator of my abduction.

"His first statement I know to be a lie. The second, in all probability, is a lie also."

Forming her conclusions on this train of reasoning, she spoke out—

"Senor Edward Blake, you lie!"

"Thank you," he said coolly, for though not quite in such plain words, she had already given him the lie.

"May I ask what reason you have for thus insulting me by calling me a liar?"

"Oh, certainly," she said, with contemptuous scorn. "I have every reason. You said the *Vendetta* was not in the bay, which is false."

"False!" he cried. "Your reason for saying it is false."

"A very plain reason," she replied. "I saw her myself. I recognized her beyond all doubt or question."

Blake started.

He was considerably astonished.

For he doubted not that she meant what she said, and that, at all events, she thought she had seen the *Vendetta*.

"Ah! you must be mistaken," he cried, forgetting, in his excitement at hearing this, his anger at her insulting words. "It must have been my vessel, the *Avenger*, you saw. When and under what circumstances did you see the *Vendetta*?"

She was impressed in a measure by his earnest, eager manner; and a faint sort of suspicion arose in her mind that he might be telling the truth, after all.

She answered him calmly, deliberately, and with much emphasis—

"I saw the *Vendetta* this day, not long ago, come out from behind the western promontory of the bay. She was steaming slowly in. Then I observed her stop. Next she steamed astern again, and soon was out of sight behind the same point of land whence she appeared."

"But the *Vendetta*—how do you know it was the *Vendetta*?" he asked.

"I recognized her by a shot-hole in her funnel," she answered, promptly; "and besides, though I am not a sailor, I knew her by her rig."

This came on him like a thunderclap.

He did not doubt her for a moment.

She had seen the *Vendetta* enter the mouth of the bay, then stop, then steam back. She knew not the reason for this manœuvre, but he did.

The entrance to the bay, just rounding the west promontory, was one of the spots from which a view could be commanded of a little gulf or inlet right at the end of the harbour.

And there, close under almost perpendicular cliffs, lay his own vessel, the *Avenger*.

Giulia d'Almaviras had not seen her ; but Black Bosco, as he came quietly sneaking into harbour with the *Vendetta*, to reclaim the prize he left behind him, saw, and, with his knowledge of the facts, recognised the *Avenger*.

For that reason he stopped his vessel, and steamed back. What would be his course ? It was not likely that he would make off altogether and relinquish all the fruits of his hitherto successful enterprise.

No ; it was pretty nearly certain that he would return, and seize the girl, if possible. Also, it was likely that, knowing for what purpose the *Avenger* was there, he would take the first opportunity of attacking her at a disadvantage.

There was no time to be lost, and Edward Blake resolved to act promptly. He did not feel in the humour to be thwarted and intimidated by a girl, and at once made up his mind he would go up to the position where she was, in spite of her threats.

"Senorita," he said, "our enemies are in the neighbourhood. I believe you have seen the *Vendetta*. My ship is also here. Those on board the *Vendetta* mean to seize you, and probably carry you off. I mean to protect and save you, in spite of yourself. So, to begin with, I am coming up there."

She hesitated for a moment or two, and then, when she saw him deliberately climbing up, she resolved not to trust him, although she felt desperately inclined so to do.

Something whispered to her that he was speaking the truth, but she would not, dared not, act on that inner belief.

"Another step, and you are a dead man !" she cried.

He saw she had no pistol, and taking no notice, calmly made his way up, resolved at all hazards to gain a footing where she was.

It was a matter of temper, of foolish pride with him, but he carried out his determination.

And so did Giulia.

For, by a slight effort of strength, she tilted a great rugged piece of rock, which the next instant came rushing down on him.

She saw it strike, saw him fall, overwhelmed by the huge mass, and then, with all a woman's contradictory nature and a woman's instinct, shrieked, covered her eyes with her hands, and burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing.

CHAPTER L.

REGRET.

As is often the case, especially with woman, when i. was too late, she regretted it, and felt horrified at the deed she had done.

And, to increase her remorse, there flashed across her mind, unwelcome and unbidden, a terrible thought.

“ Suppose, after all, he spoke the truth.”

And in spite of herself she could not dismiss a fearful misgiving.

Next she ran to the rampart and clambered to the top, and thence looked down on the mountain slope. She saw nothing of him whom she had thus ruthlessly slain, but was just in time to see the huge rock, which had gone thundering down the mountain slope, roll across the base, and plunge into the sea.

“ Ah ! villain rock,” she cried, with all a woman's perversity and capriciousness, “ you have slain him, and I but meant to frighten him away ! ”

She looked earnestly at and all around the spot where she had seen him last.

The rock on which he had stood while addressing her was shivered to atoms, the fragments strewn all about.

But no signs of Edward Blake dead or alive!

It was sunset, when she regained the platform.

Everything was exactly the same as when the sun rose.

Except one thing !

There was a small gap in the upper part of the barrier.

And as Giulia looked at it, she shuddered. For, from thence she had pushed over the rock with which she had crushed the Englishman.

Restless, wrctched, and in a state of feverish excitement, she paced up and down for a minute or so.

Then she stopped suddenly, and out flashed her keen-bladed knife.

"Ah!" she cried between her set teeth, "I have ground you and sharpened you, and shaped you to my end. But when the hour of need came, you failed me, or I failed myself. My courage failed me! Would I had let him come up, and with this alone in my hand had confronted him. But I slew him without mercy. A cruel and cowardly act. Away, useless toy!"

And passionately she flung the knife from her to the other end of the plateau.

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, than a figure rose from behind a huge boulder close to where the knife had fallen. And Edward Blake, springing down, picked up her weapon.

"I quite agree with you, senorita; a very useless toy indeed, and it was very cruel of you, not to say cowardly, to throw two tons of rock down on a poor fellow's head."

CHAPTER LI.

BLACK BOSCO DISCOVERS THE AVENGER.

On leaving Wedge Island where he had discovered the body of the unfortunate steward Gonzalvo, marooned by Black Bosco, Captain Blake, profiting by the directions on the paper in the dead man's hand, steered the *Avenger* straight for the group of islands amidst which lay the snug retreat where the slave-captain had left Giulia d'Almaviras.

It was easy enough to find the group, but far more difficult to discover a passage between them.

Resolved to use the utmost caution in such dangerous waters, Blake ordered out a boat, of which Jack O'Brien took the command.

His business was to keep some fifty yards ahead of the vessel, carefully sounding all the while, and reporting the depth of water to the officer on the forecastle of the *Avenger*, which slowly steamed on astern.

Thus cautiously feeling her way, so to speak, the *Avenger* threaded the intricate and dangerous channels between the rocks and islets, and slowly approached the island where Giulia was.

At night, Blake anchored, not choosing to risk the safety of his vessel in such dangerous navigation.

And shortly after dawn on the second day after making the group, the *Avenger* came in sight of the mouth of the bay, at the heel of which rose the hill on which was situated the eagle's nest, as Giulia had herself named it.

Jack O'Brien and Edward Blake were on the quarter-deck, carefully scrutinising the appearance of the land.

With Blake standing at the helm, O'Brien on the forecastle, keeping a vigilant look out a-head, the *Avenger* slowly steamed up the bay.

After skirting the western shore, the young captain finally steered for an inlet or creek where there seemed to be plenty of water.

It was sheltered on three sides by high cliffs, and, except from one point at the entrance of the bay, a vessel once well up this inlet could lie quite concealed from view.

Here, then, Blake moored his vessel by light spring cables, head and stern.

It happened, however, that Black Bosco, after his cruise (undertaken for some purpose of his own), returning to look after his prize, the captive maiden, got sight of the *Avenger* as she lay at anchor the instant he entered the bay.

He was aghast, for the time dumbfounded, and a terrible volley of oaths escaped him.

He had sense enough, however, to give the order to stop her and go astern, and when again hidden behind the promontory, he cried to Pedro—

“Ten thousand devils ! What ship can that be ?”

“The devil only knows,” replied the mate of the *Vendetta* ; “ask him ; you're on good terms, I believe.”

“Yes, the devil knows, and I know. It's the steamer the marquis has sent in search of his daughter, commanded by that accursed Englishman.”

“That's bad,” said Pedro, who was, be it observed, by no means so excited about it as his captain ; “how the plague did they find the island ?”

“Why, they blundered across Wedge Island, and there found the mulatto alive, and I expect from what he let drop that he had found out from my charts and notes where I really meant to take the girl. The rest is plain. He gave information how to find this island, and they have done so.”

"What shall we do—go back?" asked Pedro.

"May I burn for ever if I do!" cried Black Bosco furiously; "it is possible they may have found the girl, but it is certain they have not yet taken her away, or the steamer would not be lying there. And I'll take particular care that steamer shan't come out of the bay without fighting the *Vendetta*; and if she don't come out, why, I'll go in and blaze away at her. I'll let this whipper-snapper Englishman know what it is to have Black Bosco to deal with!"

She slave-captain at once commenced to make every possible preparation, and neglected no precaution to get his ship in the best possible fighting trim.

"To-morrow will settle it," he said; "I'll have the girl—my lawful prize—or one of two vessels shall go to the bottom—the *Avenger* or the *Vendetta*!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE REVOLVER PISTOL.

THE confusion and dismay of Giulia d'Almaviras may perhaps be imagined on the sudden appearance before her of Edward Blake in the flesh, and to all appearance alive and well.

Her first feeling was indefinite, a sort of blank astonishment mingled with terror.

Next came a thrill of satisfaction at the thought that he was alive, and she had not killed him.

He did not offer to approach her, but stood quite silent.

He was placed in a singular dilemma.

The girl had firmly persuaded herself that he was her enemy—that it was himself who had carried her off.

How to undeceive and calm her needless terror, that was the question.

A thought struck him. "I'll do it, I'll risk it," he said to himself, "if she shoots me for my rashness.

"As to what you say about placing yourself in my power, I will prove to you that your fears are quite groundless."

"You cannot, I will not believe your words."

"You shall have deeds, not words only," he replied quietly, and as he spoke he drew a revolver pistol.

"Ah! you would murder me. Do so—I fear not death."

"On the contrary, I am about giving you the means of murdering me if you so please."

"I do not understand you."

"I will make my meaning plain. You see this revolver pistol, it is loaded and capped, and, properly used, carries the death of six men. I am about to give it to you."

"A stratagem by which to approach me. I am not to be thus deceived."

"No. I do not wish to approach you. This is what I mean."

He then threw the pistol from him, and it fell within a couple of yards of where she stood.

"Take it," he said, "and fire a barrel just to satisfy yourself that I have spoken truly."

Then he quietly walked away to the other side of the platform, and climbed up on the rocks, so that it was impossible he could take her by surprise.

She hesitated for a moment, and then springing down, seized the pistol, and again took up her post on the rocks.

It was, as he said, loaded and capped.

She fired a barrel, aiming at the tarpaulin tent door, and saw the hole the bullet made.

"Now shoot at me if you choose," he said, advancing a few paces towards her. "You can kill me if you please. Take good aim and fire, I told you I would place myself in your power, I have done so."

She was utterly staggered and confounded, and knew not what to do, what to say.

CHAPTER LIII.

GIULIA TRIES THE REVOLVER.

GIULIA D'ALMAVIRAS had good reason for being bewildered at the extraordinary turn the affair had taken.

Torn by conflicting emotions, she knew not what to do, what to think even, and stood silent, pistol in hand, when his voice awakened her to the necessity of deciding on some definite course of action.

"Come, señorita, why do you not shoot? you can depend upon that pistol. It throws, perhaps, a trifle high, but not more than half a foot in twenty yards."

She made no reply, but stood gazing silently at him, as though she would read his inmost soul.

"What can I think? what shall I believe? what shall I do?" she said to herself. "Possibly this is a stratagem to throw me off my guard. Probably it is so. Yes; I am sure it is."

His next words utterly astounded her.

She forgot that her features reflected too faithfully the thought which flashed through her mind.

Blake noted and rightly interpreted the sudden change of expression which, like a cloud across the sun, flitted over her beautiful face.

"If such is your opinion," he said, "why do you not shoot and put it to the test whether you are right or wrong. Stay, I will come closer, lest you miss your aim."

And with the words, he boldly advanced several paces.

Fearful that he thought to take her unawares and disarm her by a sudden rush, she raised the pistol and levelled it at his breast.

"Advance another step and I fire!"

"I do not think you will," he said, "and yet I shall advance more than a step."

Then looking her full in the face, he came forward one—two—three paces, till he stood close at the foot of the rampart of rocks.

It was a moment of supreme, intense suspense.

The pistol was pointed, her finger on the trigger, and he could see straight down the shining tube, at the end of which was a small plug of lead which the next moment might prove his death.

"Shoot," he said; "I defy you!"

And all the while he looked her in the face with the same steady gaze, a half-smile on his lips.

Her eyes wandered restlessly for a half-second, then fell before his, and almost at the same time the hand which held the trigger fell by her side.

The victory was won, and, for the present at least, he was the conqueror.

"I suppose now," he said, "you believe me, señorita."

"No," she replied, speaking fitfully and with difficulty; "it was not that; I cannot say I believe you, but you may be speaking truly, and I would not, could not, lay the awful responsibility on my soul of taking your life in cold blood."

"You admit, then," he said, "that I placed my life entirely at your mercy?"

"I do not admit it," she replied; "for aught I know, the five barrels may not be properly loaded, and in that case, the result of my attempting to fire would have been simply the snapping of a cap."

"Oh, that point is easily settled beyond all dispute," he said; "you see that rock," he added, pointing to a huge lump of granite some yards from him, "fire at the flat face of that. It affords you a good mark, and you can easily see where the bullet strikes."

Taking him at his word, and acting promptly, as was her wont, she raised her pistol and fired as directed.

Instantly her quick eye saw that the shot had taken effect, for a puff of dust and splintered stone showed her where the bullet had struck.

Almost at the same moment she observed Blake fall back a pace or two, at the same time putting his hand to his face.

He seemed unsteady on his feet, and she saw with horror, when he removed his hand, that blood was streaming down his forehead.

"The bullet has glanced from the rock!" was the thought that flashed through her mind. "After all, I have killed him!"

At once her animosity, terror, suspicion, were all disarmed, and no longer heeding her own safety, she came down from her perch on the rocks.

Throwing down the pistol on the ground, she ran towards him.

"I have hurt you! The bullet has glanced from the rock!" she cried, in tones of real distress.

"No, no!" he replied, recovering himself, "it was only a small fragment, a mere splinter of stone. The blow staggered me for a moment; but it is nothing—nothing, I assure you."

He then seated himself, and quietly proceeded to tie a handkerchief round his cut temple.

"There is no harm done at all, I assure you," he said—"nothing beyond a broken skin and the loss of a wine-glassful of blood perhaps. I should not have got off so easily, though, if you had pulled the trigger two minutes sooner. Tell the truth, now, you had half a mind to fire, had you not?"

"Heaven be praised I did not!" she exclaimed, fervently.

"That is strange, is it not?" he said, forcing a smile, "for had you done so, you woul' have slain your enemy—the man whom you have called villain, traitor, liar!"

"Cease to taunt me!" she gasped; "I retract—I was mad with terror—I knew not what I said."

"Giulia d'Almaviras," he said, quietly, "do you believe me?—believe that every word I have spoken is the truth?—that I am a man who never told a lie?—whose honour is as unblemished as yours, or that of any member of your family?"

"I do not know. I cannot interpret my own thoughts. I half believe you, and yet I fear you. I cannot say more."

This answer by no means satisfied the captain of the *Avenger*. He, too, was hot-tempered, and had good reason to feel aggrieved at her treatment of him.

"Let it be so," he said, bowing proudly; "I shall leave you, since my presence is so offensive and the cause of such terror."

Thereupon he proceeded to clamber over the rocks, while she stood the picture of despair and doubt, dismayed at the thought of being again left alone to her own resources, and yet too proud to call him back.

He turned just before he disappeared beyond the parapet of rocks, and spoke a few words.

"I leave you now to think over your folly, and the ingratitude and injustice with which you have treated me. But I shall come back, probably to-morrow, when I hope you will have got rid of your unworthy suspicions,

and be glad to seek shelter and safety on board the *Avenger*.

"That is to say," he added, after a pause, "if El Capitano Bosco Negro, of the *Vendetta*, has not previously come and claimed you on behalf of his employer, Don Jose de Malatesta."

"Stay one moment!" she cried, her feelings overcoming her pride.

But with a wave of the hand he was gone!

As for Giulia d'Almaviras, she felt more utterly miserable and desolate than she had since the departure of Bosco.

And, worst of all, it was her own doing—by her own act she had driven him away.

Vengeance is sweet, they say, and certainly in her then state of mind he had ample revenge.

CHAPTER LIV.

BOSCO PREPARES FOR ACTION.

FOR some time Giulia d'Almaviras was incapable of acting—even of thinking. She had undergone a great revulsion of sentiment, and now felt almost that the Englishman had spoken the truth.

And if such should prove to be the case, of what egregious folly had she not been guilty!

She had certainly seen the *Vendetta*; and whereas it seemed apparent that Blake meant her no harm, it was nearly certain that the slave-captain had come back to seize his prisoner.

And he might, at that very moment, be on the island; it was possible that he was already on his way to the platform.

But what could she do? That was now the question.

Thinking she might see something of the *Vendetta*, which she knew to be in the neighbourhood, or of the *Avenger*, which Blake so confidently asserted was in the bay, she mounted the rocky parapet, and proceeded eagerly to scan the whole prospect beneath and around her.

First she looked out seawards, where she had before seen Bosco's ship, and then her gaze fell on the bay, seeking to discover the *Avenger*, which Blake said was there.

But in this she was unsuccessful, and presently, giving the task up as hopeless, came down from her perch, and again stood on the plateau.

But not before she had been descried by the keen eye of one of her greatest enemies.

Bosco, keeping his vessel hovering about the bay outside, and seeking to watch his enemy without being himself observed, wished to have a look at the retreat where he had left his prisoner. He thought that if he got a clear view of the place, he might perceive something to indicate that she was still there.

So taking his telescope with him, he went up aloft, and from thence directed the course of the ship.

He knew that from his elevated position he could see from the top of the mountain nearly to its foot, without the possibility of his vessel being seen from the deck or even the mast-head of his enemy.

For his vessel to be descried by any of the enemy would be fatal to his plans, and therefore it was that he took such precaution to avoid being seen.

Cautiously creeping along under cover of the land, Bosco so manœuvred the *Vendetta* as gradually to disclose the mountain side to his view from the summit downwards. And ere long he came in sight of the rocky fortress he had constructed where he had left Giulia d'Almaviras.

"Stop her!" he cried, the moment he could make out the retreat.

And then, as the vessel gradually lost way, and came to a standstill, he carefully scrutinized the place through his spy-glass.

It looked the same as when he left it. There was no alteration to be observed, nor was there any indication to show that any living being was there.

He was just about descending, satisfied that there was nothing to be seen, and had slung the telescope round his neck, when, happening to cast a last glance that way, he thought he saw something moving.

In half a minute the glass was again focussed and at his eye, and then he beheld that which, in his opinion, well rewarded him for his trouble and caution.

Nothing else than Giulia herself, standing on the top of a huge rock, and apparently anxiously scanning the bay and all around.

"Turn her astern!" he cried, for the top of the mast was visible from the mountain where she was, and it was possible, though not likely, she or any one else who was there might see it.

"All hands on deck!" he cried, "and get ready for action. Pedro, give the chief gunner the key of the magazine, and tell him to hand up plenty of ammunition, especially round-shot, for I do not mean to come to close quarters if I can help it."

Pedro gave this, and some other necessary orders, and then asked—

"What do you propose, capitano?"

"Steam in and attack the other ship just at sundown, taking them by surprise, if possible. As soon as the attack is fairly commenced, a strong party will land by boat, make all haste up the mountain, seize the girl, carry her down, get her on board, and then the *Vendetta* will sheer off as if she had had enough of it, and steam away to sea."

The *Vendetta* was soon ready for action, Bosco himself seeing to every detail, especially to the supply of ammunition and the state of the guns.

In half an hour from the moment when Bosco had discovered Giulia d'Almaviras standing on the rocky rampart, the *Vendetta* was steaming slowly and cautiously into the bay, her villainous crew of desperadoes, principally negroes, at quarters, arms and ammunition cumbering the decks, splinter-nettings rigged, and guns run out.

The hour of the conflict approached, and Black Bosco, having good reason to suppose that he would catch the enemy entirely unprepared, had some reason to count on an easy victory.

Had Giulia kept her post on the rampart, or even had she again mounted some half-hour later, she would have

seen the vessel of the dreaded Bosco quietly creeping round the point and entering the bay.

But for a time she did nothing. Bewildered and wretched beyond description that she was again left to herself, abandoned, as she thought, to her fate, she wasted precious minutes in despairing inaction.

After awhile she grew more composed, and as the sun approached the horizon, had almost made up her mind for certain that Edward Blake's story was true, that he was indeed her friend, and would come in the morning to take her away.

She was startled by a loud report, a sound she knew so well—that of a cannon.

It was followed by another and another, and running out from the tent she beheld, on mounting the parapet, a sight which might well fill her with dismay.

The *Vendetta* in the bay, belching forth fire and smoke from her bow guns.

She could not see the vessel against which these guns were fired, but she knew beyond all question that Edward Blake had spoken the truth, for she could see the water thrown up in the air in jets as the round-shot went ricochetting along the surface, and she guessed but too well that they were aimed at Blake's vessel, which was hidden from her view.

And in the course of a minute or two there was ample confirmation of this opinion of hers, for an answering cannonade was heard, and the water all around the *Vendetta* was splashed by the shot striking.

For a time she gazed in awe and wonder at the sight : her first experience of a sea battle ; but soon she aroused herself, and bethought her of the necessity for action.

Her first instinctive impulse was the course she adopted.

This was to fly from her rocky retreat, and, making all haste down the mountain slope, endeavour to reach the shore, near where Blake's ship lay fighting her enemies.

She made her way with the utmost possible speed down the mountain slope.

Headless of bush or bramble, her clothes torn, her deli-

cate skin even often scratched, she bounded along, agile as a fawn, narrowly escaping a fall more than once from the steepness and roughness of the ground.

She had traversed more than half of the hill, and had already gained smoother ground, when an event occurred which brought her to a sudden standstill.

Thinking to make the best of her way towards that part of the bay where, as she judged by the sound and by her observations from above, Blake's vessel lay, she bore to the left.

There was in front of her a huge rock, to avoid which she was obliged to deviate from her course.

And on rounding it she found herself suddenly in face of a party of men, a dozen at least, and at their head the ruffian Bosco himself.

That she should give vent to a scream was only natural, but even in these terrible circumstances she did not lose her nerve and presence of mind.

She had Blake's pistol in her girdle, and drawing it she levelled it at Bosco.

"I will not be taken alive by you, you cruel villain!" she cried, gaspingly; "help is at hand. I will shoot you if you advance a step. Call off your ruffians, or you are a dead man. Ah! you may well look astonished. I have a pistol, and, moreover, I have practised and learned how to use it."

In truth, Black Bosco was both astonished and taken by surprise.

Indeed, he had no weapon but a sword. Not expecting any need for their use at present, he had given over his pistols and a short carbine to be carried by one of the negroes, so as to render his ascent of the hill more easy, for Bosco, though a strong man, was rather short-winded.

CHAPTER LV

ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE AVENGER AND VENDETTA.

WHEN Black Bosco resolved on boldly steaming into the bay and attacking the *Avenger*, so as to occupy the atten-

tion of those on board while he sent a party to secure the fair Giulia herself, the prize for which he was about to fight, and risk so much—life itself, for he might, of course, be killed, or defeated and captured, when death by the garotte must be his fate—he probably adopted the best possible plan for gaining his end.

Edward Blake did not anticipate an attack. He thought that the desperado, even if aware that the *Avenger* was in the bay, would keep hovering about the mouth of the harbour, and if he did attack at all, that it would be a night affair.

He was of opinion, however, that he would do nothing till either he knew for certain where the girl was, or till Don Jose reinforced him with another vessel, an event which the young commander knew might be looked for at any time.

Accordingly, he laid his plans, and decided on a course of action.

After he had left Giulia's stronghold on the mountain where he and she had played such an exciting little drama, to no audience but the wild birds, his anger at her treatment of him began to cool down, and he bethought himself that it would be cruel and ungenerous to take her at her word, and leave her to the mercy of Bosco, whom he quite believed to be in the vicinity.

Certain, however, that the *Vendetta* was not in the bay at that time, he resolved to leave her awhile to her own reflections, and when he got on board his ship send his first lieutenant, Jack O'Brien, with a party to her to offer her once more shelter and protection from her foes.

About this there was no hurry, so that those he sent reached the place where she was before dark. He had no doubt of being able to give O'Brien such directions that he could not miss finding her singular abode on the mountain where he had discovered her.

Thus, then, it happened that the captain of the *Avenger* was really taken by surprise when the *Vendetta* appeared in sight, steaming steadily towards where his vessel lay.

Taken by surprise, but not unprepared; for Blake had given orders that the ship, immediately on his return from

his expedition up the mountain, should be got ready for action.

The decks were cleared, ammunition laid in readiness, and small arms placed in racks convenient to hand.

He always insisted on a good look-out, and the crew of the *Avenger* were thus employed when the man at the mast-head gave the alarm—

“Sail ho ! A steamer coming up the bay !”

Black Bosco stood on the forecastle of the *Vendetta* as she steamed in, directing her course.

His keen eye noted the sudden confusion on board the *Avenger*—a running to and fro—excitement, in fact.

“They have seen us,” he said to Pedro. “They keep a good look-out. Ready with the bow guns. We’ll open the ball, and perhaps a lucky shot may disable her at the first go off.”

In less than two minutes the bow guns were levelled at the *Avenger*, all ready to open fire.

Bosco himself aimed both, and gave the word.

The shot was seen to strike the water half a mile or so from the enemy, ricochet a few times, and then plunge into the sea, to be seen no more.

The guns were fired with too low an elevation, and Bosco hastened to remedy this mistake.

The next two shots went inside of the mark, and by this time the *Avenger* had commenced to return the fire.

Bosco found, to his dismay, that the practice of the *Avenger* was excellent, and that she fired shell from some of her guns.

One of these deadly engines of war burst over the main-deck, killing two of his men outright, and wounding several others.

On the other hand, his guns were of heavier calibre, and he judged it prudent not to approach nearer to his antagonist, thus formidably provided with the newest improvement in artillery.

It was, indeed, with the small Armstrong guns which the marquis had fortunately provided, Edward Blake was able thus to have the superiority.

Bosco accordingly gave the order to go astern, all the

while, however, keeping up a brisk fire, and occasionally manoeuvring her so as to present nearly her full broadside to the enemy, on which occasions he was able to use his other guns.

By going astern slowly, imperceptibly to those on board the *Avenger*, he altered the range which they had got with deadly accuracy, and the dangerous shells began to fall about and burst in mid-air before reaching the *Vendetta*.

On the other hand, Bosco saw that he had hit his antagonist several times in the hull, besides having done a good deal of damage about her rigging.

His guns, loaded with round-shot, were well aimed, and as he knew exactly the pace at which the *Vendetta* was going astern, he could make his calculations, and alter the elevation of his guns accordingly.

The consequence was that his shot fell thick and fast about the *Avenger*, dashing up jets of water, throwing spray on board, and several times roaring through her rigging, and more than once striking her hull.

The *Vendetta* had by this time gone astern, so as to be fully a quarter of a mile further from the *Avenger* than she was when the action began.

The fire of the latter was nothing like so accurate and dangerous, though they had in a measure recovered the range as at first.

“Pedro,” said Bosco, “have one of the boats manned with a dozen or so good men, well armed, take the boat on the port quarter, the enemy cannot see it lowered, and the hull of the ship will hide it from their view, as we row towards the shore.”

“You are going ashore, then, capitano ? ” asked Pedro.

“I am ; and shall leave the ship in charge of you, till I come back. Now just attend to my orders, and see that you obey implicitly.”

“Yes, capitano.”

“You will keep the vessel in almost this position, unless they appear to have got a more accurate range, or fire with heavier cannon.”

“Very good, capitano.”

"In which case you will back astern still further, but slowly, so that they may not perceive the manœuvre. By this means you will again alter the range, and derange their aim."

"I understand, capitano."

"Meanwhile, you will not let your fire slacken, and by no means allow the vessel to get into such a position as to lose sight of the enemy. And should the enemy move from her moorings as if about to come out into the bay, you will let me know."

"But shall you be in sight?"

"Probably not."

"Then how shall I let you know?"

"I shall not be out of hearing."

"I do not understand, capitano. You are going ashore, which is half a mile distant ; the strongest voice, with the best speaking-trumpet, could not be heard so far."

"Listen, blockhead, and I will tell you," said Bosco ; "the moment the enemy casts off from her moorings and shows signs of moving, you will acquaint me of the fact by suddenly ceasing to fire the bow guns, and, after a short interval, will give a salvo with the broadside guns ; fire a broadside all at once, no matter whether or not you can aim at the enemy."

"I understand, capitano."

"Good ; see you attend strictly to my directions. I hope to be back in less than an hour, bringing the girl with me."

"Is the boat ready ?" shouted Black Bosco to the petty officer whose duty it was to see to it.

"All ready, capitano, and at the port gangway."

With a parting caution to Pedro, the mate, to attend strictly to his orders, Bosco went over the side, and took his seat in the stern-sheets of the boat.

"Give way, my lads, give way with a will !"

The next moment the boat was shooting over the quiet waters of the bay, Bosco so steering her as to keep the hull of the *Vendetta* as much as possible between him and the enemy, for he was desirous of landing unseen, if possible.

In this he succeeded, and in less than a quarter of an hour stepped on shore, and leaving one man in charge of the

boat, proceeded with all haste towards the spot on the mountain side where he hoped to find his captive.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED.

BLAKE debated within himself the policy of leaving his snug berth, going out into the bay, and tackling the *Vendetta* at close quarters.

There was only one thing which made him hesitate in doing this—the girl herself, Giulia d'Almaviras, to rescue whom he had come on this expedition.

He knew that a short time previously she was on the island, for he had left her on the plateau, and heard her last words, bidding him to stay.

Now he thought it possible that if he went out to fight the *Vendetta*, that vessel would make all sail, and steam away and decoy him into pursuit. In the course of the chase, Bisco, who was a cunning as well as a bold villain, might elude him by dodging about the intricate channels among the islands, and perhaps might, for the time, get out of sight and be able to double back to the bay, seize the girl, and escape altogether.

Had Giulia been on board the *Avenger*, it would have been a different thing altogether. He would have sent her down the lower hold, below the water-line, and then have steamed boldly out and given battle to the *Vendetta*, so confident was he in the goodness of his cause, and his ability to gain the victory.

But under the circumstances, it would not be prudent, and might defeat the very object he had in view.

The heaviest gun they had on board was disabled, an apparently trifling accident to the somewhat complicated machinery rendering it useless until repaired.

An engineer and two skilled workmen were busily employed upon this, and Blake eagerly awaited the time when he would open fire with this formidable piece of artillery, which threw a shell more than double the diameter of any he had yet been able to use.

Blake minutely described the road to the place where he had left Giulia, and the appearance of the rocky fortress itself.

"But suppose she won't come," asked Jack O'Brien, who was to go for her, "shall I compel her—shall I use force?"

Blake mused for a moment or two, and then replied—

"Yes, decidedly. It will be best, even for her own sake. But be as gentle as possible with her."

"How many men shall I take?" asked the lieutenant

"Oh, say eight or ten, or perhaps half-a-dozen may be enough. It is always well to be prepared, and that amiable Bosco might screw up courage, steam up alongside, and attempt to take us by the board."

In five minutes Jack O'Brien, with seven men armed with cutlasses and pistols, were ready to start.

On landing, they kept to the shore at first, as by that course they would come across a certain landmark, and also arrive at a spot whence they could see the mountain fortress where Blake had last seen Giulia.

For his own guidance, if he should have occasion to go back, Blake had fastened a strip torn from his handkerchief to a bush, and another a hundred yards nearer the place they wanted to reach, thus distinctly marking the course.

After an hour's brisk walking, they reached the place indicated, and Jack O'Brien could clearly discover the barrier of rocks some distance up the mountain, behind which he believed the fair Giulia then was.

"Come on, boys; we'll be there in a quarter of an hour."

And following him as he went ahead, almost at a run, they made very good progress up the slope.

At this very moment, however, though they knew it not, Black Bosco and his party was more than half a mile ahead of them.

CHAPTER LVII.

BETRAYED.

WE left Giulia d'Almaviras confronting Black Bosco with her pistol levelled at his breast, her eyes flaming, no sign o' fear in her demeanour, though, to say the truth, her ~~her~~ fluttered in her breast in an unwonted manner.

Her words were not without effect on Bosco, and as he gazed at her, like a beautiful she-panther at bay, he thought to himself—

“By St. Diavolo, it is a high-spirited senorita, this daughter of the marquis. She is, I believe, quite capable of keeping her word and putting a bullet into me. The pistol is levelled true enough, and her hand does not tremble. I must talk with her and get possession of her by stratagem without giving her the opportunity to hurt me, or to turn the weapon against herself, which I believe she would do in her rage and despair if she could.”

Bosco was well aware that the money value of his prize depended upon her being alive, uninjured, and with her beauty unimpaired.

To kill her would be indeed folly; so the question was how to seize her without giving her a chance to use her pistol.

“Do not be rash, senorita,” he said, “I wished to speak to you quietly.”

“What have you to say?”

“Lower your pistol.”

“No.”

“Foolish of you,” he replied, coolly; “your arm will grow tired, and before long your hand will tremble, and it will be useless to you, for if you fire then you will assuredly miss.”

There was much truth in this, and she saw it.

Glancing quickly around, she lowered her arm, but did not take her finger from the trigger.

She judged that she could level it again and fire at the first hostile movement she saw on his part.

“What have you to say?”

“A great deal. In the first place I have to inform you that you were not abducted for any purpose of my own.”

“Ah! for what then?”

“I was paid, and well paid to do it.”

“Who hired you to commit such an infamous crime?” she cried, interested and thrown off her guard.

“Don Jose de Malatesta,” he answered promptly.

“Ah!” she cried, and instantly it flashed across her mind

that this statement tallied with what the Englishman had told her, and was probably true.

"And for what purpose did Don Jose commit such an infamy? What had I done to him that he should thus treat me?"

"Ah!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders; "I do not know; that is his business, and he did not confide his secret thoughts to me. I can form a guess, though. But you had better ask him yourself when you see him."

"When I see him!" she cried.

"Yes, which will be to-morrow, at the latest; when he will come to seize his prey—that is, if you do not listen to reason."

"But you own that you are in his pay—his agent and accomplice in this villainy."

"I was."

"You mean to say that you are not so now."

"I do. Don Jose is a villain!"

"I believe it," she replied quickly; "I quite believe that, and also that you are."

"Granted," he replied, with the utmost *sang froid*; but I am no longer Don Jose's villain."

"How is that? I do not understand."

"I have quarrelled with him."

"How—why?" she asked.

"Because he is a mean, dishonourable wretch, and wishes to avoid paying me even the sum he promised for carrying you off."

"You have seen him since, then?" asked Giulia, becoming more and more interested.

"I have, and made all haste here to balk him of his prey, as he is rascal enough to try to cheat me of my promised reward; a reward well earned, I can tell you, for I risked my neck—risked death by the garotte, in carrying you off."

"What security have I that you speak truth?" she asked.

"I can give no security," he replied. "But I warn you, that if you refuse, to-morrow, at the latest, Don Jose will be here (for he knows where you are) with a large force, and will certainly get possession of you, dead or alive."

"It shall not be alive," Giulia muttered between her teeth ; and then said aloud with great imprudence—

"But there is already here a vessel come to rescue me."

"A vessel ! What vessel ?" asked Bosco, in affected surprise.

"The *Avenger*, commanded by a Captain Blake, dispatched by my father to find and rescue me."

Bosco looked astonished, and then laughed aloud—

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! that is good. The *Avenger*, commanded by the Englishman Blake. Why, he is in league with Don Jose de Malatesta. Don Jose sent him off to keep guard over you, to see that you did not escape, promising to follow in all haste."

Giulia d'Almaviras was bewildered, torn by conflicting thoughts and emotions.

What Bosco said seemed very probable, and agreed with her first impression and opinion of the Englishman Blake.

"What a crafty villain must this latter be !" she thought to herself, "if indeed he were an accomplice of Don Jose."

She was debating with herself and trying to think what test she could devise, but seeing a movement among his followers, and also that he advanced a step, she instantly raised her pistol again, and levelled it, as before, at his breast.

"Fall back, or I fire ! Retire for half an hour ; then return, and I will give you my answer."

Black Bosco fell back as ordered, but there was a look on his face, a wicked gleam in his eye, which she could not account for.

She lowered her pistol as she saw him retreat, and at the same moment the slave-captain shouted—

"Now on to her !"

And in an instant, before Giulia could even turn to face the danger, the brawny arms of a huge negro were around her.

She was powerless, utterly, in that strong grasp, and could only shriek aloud.

Betrayed, beguiled, thrown off her guard by the too-cunning Bosco, Giulia d'Almaviras was once more a prisoner in his power.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SCREAM.

WHILE the events narrated in the last chapter had been occurring on shore, on board the *Avenger* and the *Vendetta* things remained for some time as they were when Bosco and O'Brien left their respective vessels.

The *Vendetta* continued to back astern slowly, firing all the while with her bow guns, while the *Avenger* briskly returned the fire.

Pedro had by this time discovered that heavier artillery was practising on him, and hastened to get the *Vendetta* further away, and beyond the range of such unpleasant visitors.

Hence the next two or three shots fell short, and then when a higher elevation was used by the gunners of the *Avenger*, the range was not obtained so accurately.

And in a few minutes it became apparent that the enemy was at such a distance as to render it almost a matter of pure chance.

Certainly, she might be hit by a lucky shot, or a shell bursting near might do damage ; but there was no certainty of anything except burning powder, and using up shell, and risking an injury to the somewhat delicate mechanism of the Armstrong gun.

So Blake gave the order to cease firing, and in a short time the two vessels lay in sight of each other, distant over a mile, silent but watchful.

The captain of the *Avenger* now began to expect his lieutenant, and grew impatient for his arrival.

At this juncture the second lieutenant said, " I was just coming to tell you, sir, that there's a body of men moving along under the rocks, about half a mile off. I think it's Mr. O'Brien and his party, but they may be enemies ; so I thought I'd better tell you."

" Quite right, Mr. Wilton," replied Blake, mounting the rail, and examining the approaching group with his spy-glass

" Yes, that's our party," said Blake, " beyond doubt. But I don't see Mr. O'Brien ; I suppose he's behind the rest, and so hidden."

He handed the glass to the second lieutenant.

"What do you make of them?" he asked.

"They're our men right enough, sir, but they seem to come on very slowly, and there's something about them I can't make out. They seem to be all close together—and—yes—they are—carrying something."

Blake took the spy-glass from his lieutenant, and again looked out.

"By Jove! so they are. Ah! now I see. The girl was foolish and obstinate—refused to come—so O'Brien, according to orders, seized her by force, and they are obliged to carry her. It's all right; make haste and get everything ready for sea. We'll be clear of these islands before the moon rises, I hope."

It was now getting dark, which accounted for Blake being unable to discern the real state of affairs, when he looked at the approaching party through the telescope.

* * * * *

When Giulia d'Almaviras was thus rudely seized from behind by one of Bosco's negroes, she could do nothing, as we have said, but scream.

And this she did to such good effect, that another of the ruffians—the boatswain—said to Bosco—

"Shall I gag her, capitano?"

"No," was the reply; "let her shriek to her heart's content. If it pleases her, it does not hurt me."

So Giulia screamed on, struggling the while, till, from sheer exhaustion, her screams and struggles grew fainter and feebler, and at last ceased altogether, and this poor, trapped bird lay panting and trembling in the arms of the negro.

How this was brought about is easily accounted for. While Bosco was pretending to listen to her, he was, in reality, giving directions to his men behind him.

"Go round, two of you; make a complete circuit round that rock, if you have to go half a mile. Steal up quietly behind the girl. I will keep her attention engaged, and when I give the word, throw yourself upon her before she can use the pistol."

These instructions were but too well carried out, and the unhappy Giulia found herself again a prisoner in the hands

of the brutal Bosco, the agent and tool of her most bitter enemy.

Giulia, who had now regained the full command of her faculties, and whom familiarity with exciting scenes had wonderfully improved in the way of courage and presence of mind, looked about.

Her keen eyes discerned something before Bosco himself.

To the right, and advancing along the edge of the scrub, but still on the open smooth ground, she saw a party of seven or eight.

They were only distant about seventy yards, and her keen glance at once made out that they were not of Bosco's party, by their attire and general appearance.

They, too, had come to a sudden halt, and as she gazed, she saw come out from among them, and advance a pace or two in front, as if to get a good view, an officer in uniform.

The uniform, though not that of the Royal Navy, was certainly English.

She had knowledge enough to be sure on that point.

And the next instant she felt equally certain that these were Englishmen, probably belonging to Edward Blake's ship—the *Avenger*.

There was hope in the thought.

Bosco at that instant perceived them too, and also knew who they were.

“*Diavolo!*” he cried, “hasten—quick, you devils you, run for the boats, and you, Gamba, you great brute, use your strength and follow me.”

Giulia's mouth was free, she had long since ceased to scream, and Bosco forgot that she might do so now.

“Help, help! for the love of heaven help! Senors, Englishmen, save me! help, help!”

“Ten thousand devils!” yelled Bosco, “hold your noise.”

And with the words the brutal ruffian struck the unhappy girl a back-handed blow on the mouth, which cut her lip and drew blood.

But she had gained her end.

Her shrill voice, raised to its highest pitch, sounded clear and clarion-like on the evening air.

Every word she uttered was distinctly heard and understood by Jack O'Brien, whose party this was.

At once he perceived that he had been forestalled, and the señorita had been seized by the enemy.

And at the same moment he resolved to recapture her.

Bosco and his party were soon in full career towards the boat, and as the ground was tolerably smooth, and grew more so every yard they got nearer to the beach, if anything was to be done it must be at once.

"Come on, lads," cried O'Brien, "follow me, be jabers! we'll foil the villains yet."

With the words, he started off at a run, not directly towards Bosco and his men, but so as to intercept them, to get between them and the boat.

But the Englishmen had nearly double the distance to do. It is true they were not cumbered with a burden as was one of Bosco's negroes, and were more nimble and active.

These latter circumstances enabled them to come up rapidly, and in a couple of minutes, though going in a diagonal direction, they were within twenty or thirty yards of the others.

"Halt, lads, and give them a volley; aim at Bosco, the one with the red silk scarf round his waist, take good and steady aim—he is the captain, hit him and the game is ours."

Bosco had imprudently come over from the other side of his men, where he was comparatively covered, to this, so as to observe the movements of the Englishmen.

He could see, and, moreover, hear distinctly, and did so, with respect to O'Brien's last words.

He knew he was in imminent danger—exposed to the deliberate aim of seven or eight, it would be almost a miracle if, at so short a range, he escaped. O'Brien's party halted and prepared to fire.

"Hold hard!" shouted O'Brien, suddenly, in the greatest excitement, "don't fire—let not a man pull a trigger."

CHAPTER LIX.

GIULIA IN BOSCO'S POWER AGAIN.

THIS order, just as his men were levelling their pistols and taking aim with every prospect of success, would seem

to any one who did not know the reason, a most strange and unadvisable one.

But O'Brien had good reason for it.

Bosco's habitual cunning came to his aid now, and with cruel strategy he seized Giulia from the arms of the negro, Gamba.

"Let go ; I'll carry her," he cried, "you get your cutlass and pistol ready."

Then he, strong as a bull, took her in his arms, and so disposed her as to make her a rampart against his own body.

It was a device as cruel as it was cunning.

He rightly calculated its effect—what would follow.

The Englishmen, as he foresaw, forebore to fire for fear of injuring the girl, and thus he escaped almost the certainty of being killed or wounded.

Meanwhile he urged his men on to gain the boat.

By the halt to fire, which order was countermanded, the Englishman lost nearly a minute, and Bosco's party had almost reached the boat—were within fifty yards of it—when they again started.

"Come on, lads," shouted O'Brien, waving his sword, "follow me ; there's not a moment to be lost."

But though he and his men ran well, the first of Bosco's were on the shore alongside the boat, while the English were still forty or fifty yards away.

Bosco himself, though laden with Giulia d'Almaviras, was not last, and the instant he got up to the boat he flung her in with such brutal violence as to bruise and almost render her insensible.

"Look after her, some of you vagabonds !" he cried to his men ; "see that she does not escape !"

Escape !

Unhappy girl ! She lay bruised, bleeding, panting for breath, almost unconscious, her head resting on one of the thwarts, which was stained with the blood which flowed from a wound on her temple.

"Father of heaven !" she murmured in her agony of mind and body, "let me die ; take me to Thyself !"

"Now, my men, give them a volley !" cried Bosco, as the English charged on.

Seven or eight pistols were fired a second or two after this, and the foremost of the English fell.

This caused, as it invariably does in warfare—with large bodies of men as well as small—some confusion and a brief halt.

One of the wounded men was badly hurt—shot in the chest—the other had received only a slight flesh wound in the thigh, and picking himself up, tied a handkerchief round the limb, and declared he was all right again.

And now the charge was turned into a desultory fire on either side.

This is a sort of thing which military officers greatly deplore, but strive vainly to prevent even with the bravest troops.

In this case it was some minutes or so before O'Brien was able to lead his little force on for another rush, which he well knew was the only way to recover the seniorita.

And he had now only six men besides himself, opposed to double the number of the enemy.

These latter had nearly all gained the boat, and the girl herself, for whose sake they were fighting, had been thrown on board like a bundle of goods.

Bosco and about six of his men remained on the bank, in order to protect the boat, while she was being cast off and the oars shipped.

So far, then, as the fight on land was concerned, it seemed about even, and Jack O'Brien felt confident of success.

Cheering on his men, and fully a couple of yards in advance of the foremost of them, he himself made a dash at Bosco, and aimed a furious blow at him with his sword.

But the ruffian, who had been in many hand-to-hand affairs, calmly and easily warded it off, and then thrust quickly in return.

Our friend, by springing back, was able to avoid a severe wound; but, as it was, Bosco pricked him in the shoulder.

This gave him a lesson—a pretty severe one—and he felt that Bosco was not a man to be vanquished by a blind rush.

By this time O'Brien's men had joined in the fray. Cut-

lasses clashed—oaths and yells were heard, as is usually the case in such moments, on all hands—and the sum total was a most tremendous din, rendered more exciting by the occasional crack and flash of a pistol.

The negroes felt the superiority of the English, if not in strength, certainly in endurance and courage, and several of them falling back, leaped into the boat.

Bosco saw this—saw that he would shortly be left alone—and so also did O'Brien.

"Come on, my lads ; they are funkings. Don't let the boat get off. Hurrah for the *Avenger*!"

Then he made another determined attack on Bosco, his men well backing him.

But Bosco parried his thrusts and guarded his cuts without great difficulty, although he began to get a little out of breath. Herein, in his superior youth, stamina, and activity, lay O'Brien's advantage, and he had every chance of tiring out and defeating his formidable antagonist.

But Bosco saw this, and also that most of his men had taken to the boat, that the oars were slipped, and all was ready to push off from the shore.

So he in his turn attacked O'Brien, and as, besides being a good swordsman, he was the stronger and heavier man, he had a great advantage, and our friend had to retreat.

But this was only a ruse on Bosco's part.

No sooner had O'Brien fallen back a little than he himself, glancing over his shoulder, suddenly ran to the shore, and sprang into the boat.

All of his followers had by this time embarked except two, and to these he shouted—

"Now then, jump in, and risk breaking your shins. Shove off, you with the boat-hook."

The next moment the boat was clear of the land, and O'Brien beheld himself baffled—defeated.

Furious at thus failing so ignominiously, his courage and rage got the better of his prudence, and he leaped into the water, which was nearly up to his middle, and cutting savagely with his sword, laid hold of the boat with the other hand.

Some of his men followed him, not with any hope of

success, but to protect their rash officer, to whom they were all devoted.

Of course he had not a chance, and a sword-thrust through the left arm, followed by a terrible blow on the head from the man with the boat-hook, decided the affair.

O'Brien fell back in the water almost senseless, and but for his men would have been drowned, while Bosco bore off his prize in triumph and gained the *Vendetta* in safety.

"*San Diavolo*, thanks," he muttered, as he stood once more on the deck of his ship. "You befriended me this time like a good patron saint as you are! It was a near thing. Those English are bold rascals, and hard to beat off."

CHAPTER LX.

"AFTER HIM, NED—FIRE AWAY!"

EDWARD BLAKE, from the moment O'Brien's party had been seen approaching, was in a fever of excitement and impatience.

He was annoyed at the damage done to the *Avenger* by the fire of the *Vendetta*, and was anxious to get out and chastise that audacious buccaneer.

The spirit of combativeness, deeply implanted in the breast of every man of spirit, was now fully aroused, and he felt inclined to fight were it only for fighting's sake, and without any object whatever.

He hastened from end to end of the ship, hurrying up and overlooking the preparations for casting off and putting to sea, and was here, there, and everywhere.

"Captain Blake," said the second lieutenant, coming up, "two or three minutes back a boat went alongside the *Vendetta*, and now she's slewing round; they are up to some manœuvre or other."

Blake hurried to the quarter-deck, took the spy-glass from the belaying-pin at the mast where it hung, and looked at the enemy.

"By Jove! I believe she's going to make a bolt of it. I do believe she's going to put to sea," he cried.

And in ten minutes more this was sufficiently obvious.

The *Vendetta* had turned completely round, and now presented her stern instead of her bows.

"Yes; she's off, and as it is almost dark will probably escape us," said the second lieutenant.

Jack O'Brien and party arrived soon after this; he had to be assisted on board, Blake ran to receive him at the gangway.

"You are not badly hurt, my dear boy?" he said, anxiously taking his arm, and assisting him down into the cabin.

"No, not much."

"Not shot in any vital part?"

"No; only sword-cuts and bruises. Not much hurt in body, only weak and faint, and a little sore. But, Blake, I am very bad in mind; for I have failed. That rascal has defeated us, and carried off the girl. He's got her on board. He'll be off to sea with her—After him, Ned, fire away! never mind me! send the doctor, he'll do for me! But don't let that vagabond Bosco escape!"

O'Brien fell back on the couch faint after this speech, and Blake, seeing the wisdom of his words, after sending for the surgeon hurried on deck, and the instant he was there he shouted—

"Let go all—let go everything but the starboard bow hawser and haul in on that."

The crew, all on deck in a state of anxious excitement, let go and hauled in with a will, and in a minute or so the *Avenger's* head swung round and pointed towards the mouth of the bay.

"Go ahead, engineer," shouted Blake down the engine hatch, "full speed, and keep your fires going, and a full head of steam. Mr. Wilson," to the second lieutenant, "I leave the deck in charge of you for a few minutes while I go down to see to poor O'Brien."

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CHASE IS IN SIGHT.

LIEUTENANT WILSON met Blake at the top of the companion way.

"The man at the look-out at the mast-head has seen fire and sparks over the land, which he supposes, and so do I, come from the funnel of the chase."

"Where away?"

"To the westward, sir."

"Good; then she's off to some place between this and Havannah, a rendezvous appointed by Don Jose, I fancy. Keep her going at full speed. It's dangerous, but I want to get clear of these cursed islands while there's any daylight left."

Blake took a look around and aloft, saw that all possible canvas was set, and then went aft to the wheel to superintend the steering.

"Go forward on the forecastle, Mr Wilson; keep a bright look-out a-head, and if ever you did use your eyes, do so now."

"Aye, aye, sir."

It was indeed dangerous navigation, for although the young commander had carefully noted and marked down both on a chart of the bay he had made, and on his mind, the principal reefs, rocks, and shoals, yet there might be others he had not observed.

As for the islands, or rather islets, for some of them were no more than huge rocks, there was still light enough to see them.

The sky was clear, the *Avenger* tearing ahead at a prodigious rate, and thus Blake calculated on being entirely clear of the land and out of danger before it was absolutely dark.

Another hour passed, the strained engines of the *Avenger* groaning, and the good ship creaking and trembling in every timber, from the heavy pressure of steam and sail. Blake kept on her.

The light was now quite plainly visible, and it was obvious to any one that they were fast coming up with her.

Just at this time the engines stopped suddenly.

Something was the matter, that was certain.

Blake ran to the engine-hatch, and was met by the second engineer coming up.

"What's the matter, Mr. Brown?"

"An accident to the machinery of some kind, sir, but I

can't say what. The chief engineer's attending to it, and has sent me to his berth for some tools."

"The engines broken down!" cried Blake, in despairing accents. "Fortune has indeed deserted me!"

* * * * *

The *Vendetta* was going through the water at excellent speed, and there was no trace of the *Avenger* astern; and Bosco flattered himself he had got clear away, and was safe from pursuit.

So fiercely were the furnaces kept burning by his orders, that lurid flame and sparks leaped from the funnel.

This gave him considerable annoyance, as, in case of pursuit, the light would guide the enemy.

He hesitated for a while whether or not to order the fires to be reduced, but he judged it best, on the whole, to keep up a high pressure of steam, so as to get over the greatest possible distance in case of pursuit.

For, although Bosco was certainly not a coward, yet he did not fancy fighting the *Avenger* if he could help it; for he had got the prize, the abducted girl, in his hands; and victory would put him in no better a position, while defeat would be fatal to him—capture, almost certain death.

And, moreover, he by no means liked the thought of the shells the *Avenger* fired, as he well knew how deadly they would prove at close quarters.

So, under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Bosco should be most dreadfully anxious to escape from and get beyond reach of pursuit.

The clock struck the hour of eleven, and scarcely had the last chime sounded, than the engines first eased, then stopped altogether.

Bosco hastened towards the engine-hatch, and was met by the chief engineer.

"What means this stopping?" asked Bosco.

"A break down, captain," replied the engineer; "it is no use disguising the matter."

A volley of oaths escaped Bosco, as was usual when he was annoyed.

"Will it take long to repair?"

"Two hours at least."

"Confound it! if the *Avenger* is in pursuit, she must be up with us by that time.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE MARITANA.

AND now leaving both the *Avenger* and the *Vendetta* we will transport ourselves on board the third steamer, mentioned some chapters back, as being bound apparently to the Caribbean Sea.

This is the *Maritana*, Capitano Joachim Gonzalvez, and she is cruising about in the neighbourhood of the island where Pedro, the mulatto, was maimed and left to perish by Black Bosco.

She has on board Don Jose de Malatesta, and he and the captain are eagerly on the look-out for this island.

The date is the same afternoon on which the fight for the possession of Giulia d'Almaviras took place on the island between Blake's men and those of Black Bosco.

Don Jose was on deck by sunrise, and after a sleepless night. Two hours later a noise like distant thunder was heard.

"What is that—thunder?" he asked.

The captain listened and replied—

"No, not thunder."

"What then?"

"A distant cannonade. Two ships fighting at sea, I imagine."

As the steamer got clear of the land, the sound of the distant cannonade grew plainer; and what was at first a distant rumbling noise, and which Don Jose had attributed to thunder, assumed a different character.

The continuous rumb'e gave place to distinct reports, sometimes faint, and again occasionally very loud, as though a broadside or several guns were fired together.

The captain of the *Maritana* was thoughtful and reserved; but there was an expression in his face which seemed to say that he knew or guessed more than he chose to say, or more than he did say, at all events.

At the end of an hour Don Jose and the captain were anxiously on the look-out for the vessel or vessels they expected to see ahead.

Meanwhile, the *Maritana*, a large corvette, not required by the Spanish Government, and which Don Jose had purchased at a high price, previously to arranging in the abduction of the fair Giulia, had been got ready for action.

Her decks were cleared, crew mustered, the guns of heavy metal cleared, the powder magazine opened, and ammunition got in readiness ; in fact, everything was done as though a sea battle was a certainty.

The crew numbered a hundred and thirty men—more than there were on board the *Avenger* and the *Vendetta* together.

Don Jose had put to sea, thus heavily armed and manned, for a very good reason. He knew that Blake, the Englishman, had already sailed with a swift, armed vessel, in search of the *Vendetta*, and he had some fear that he even knew the whereabouts of the island where Bosco was to land the girl.

Now, Don Jose had had a taste of the young officer's pluck and prowess, and determined that if they did meet, the advantage should be all on his side.

And at the last moment he put more guns and fifty additional men on board the *Maritana*.

To the annoyance of Don Jose and the captain, the weather, which had been beautifully clear in the early evening, now grew rather thick, and there were symptoms of rain. But presently the captain cried—

“There ! ten points on the starboard bow !” Then to the helmsman—“South-east-by-south.”

About three or four miles distant a steamer could be made out steering straight for them.

As they gazed, she swerved in her course, so as to present part of her broadside to the enemy.

The next moment there was a flash and puff of smoke, followed at a short interval by the report of a heavy gun.

“There, now we see her plainly,” exclaimed the captain.

“Well, and what do you make of her ?” asked Don Jose, who was not so well up in naval matters as the seaman, and could not recognize a ship some miles off.

"What do I make of her?—The *Vendetta*, Il Capitano Bosco Negro; there's no doubt about that, and she's chased by some vessel, I reckon, by her firing astern."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE RAPIDAN.

AND now we will pay a visit to yet another vessel, making the fourth within the last few chapters.

This one is the United States man-of-war *Rapidan*.

Apparently she has not yet succeeded in coming up with and sinking the Confederate privateer, or pirate, as the worthy Yankee captain calls her—the cruiser with the gentle name, but far from amiable character—the *Turtle Dove*.

"Halloo, captain, turn out. I have news for you," shouted the first lieutenant, entering the cabin of the commander shortly after daybreak on the same morning as the events narrated in the last chapter took place.

"Eh—eh! what is it?" cried the captain, springing out of his cot, in shirt and drawers. "The *Turtle Dove* iu sight? Darned if I didn't dream as we'd come up with her and sunk her in twenty minutes, rot her timbers!"

"No, captain, the *Turtle Dove* ain't in sight."

"What the thunder is then?"

"Nothing."

"What did you wake me up for then? Why, it can't be more than two bells in the morning watch."

"That's a fact, captain."

"Well, what on earth did you wake me up for?"

The lieut'enant, who had been listening intently, cried—

"Hark!"

"Eh! What's that, thnnder?" said the captain, as a low, booming sound fell on his ears.

"No, cap'in, not thunder, it's a noise as we've heard more than once both of us."

"Big gun, by Jehoshaphat! I'm on deck like a streak of lightning."

And indeed the captain was not long iu performing his toilette, and was on deck, hair all rough, and half dressed, in less than two minutes.

"Ship in sight—what do you make of her? There she goes again!" as the report of a cannon came booming across the water.

"Make of her, cap'in? just this—*it's that cursed Vendetta I boarded the other day, and she's chased.* What do you say?"

The captain took a good look.

"Right you are, by thunder!" he exclaimed; "that's the same darned craft. Wonder what she's been up to."

"No good, I'll bet my life," said the lieutenant. "If ever I saw a hang-dog rascal, her captain is one."

"Maybe he's got the young lady who threw out the bottles, with the paper inside on board."

"Stop her!" shouted the captain.

The lumbering, groaning engines ceased their monotonous work, and the ship soon came to a standstill.

"Ahead easyhard-a-starboard!" was the next order.

And then the *Rapidan* made a half circle, so that her stem was presented to the *Vendetta*.

"Steady! go ahead! full speed!" shouted the captain.

"You are going to leave her, cap'in?" asked the mate, with some disappointment.

"Nary bit, my boy; I'm just going to sheer off a little further, so as to keep her from seeing us without losing sight of her. This little affair must be watched. I must just see what's up. May be, Uncle Sam may have a word or two to say in the matter. The tarnation scoundrel, to go and kidnap a gal! Blood's thicker than water, mister!"

"It air, by thunder!"

It was just at this time that the *Maritana* came in full view of the *Vendetta*, so that, as we close this chapter, Black Bosco's vessel is the object of keen scrutiny by two other armed vessels.

CHAPTER LXIV

THE MADONNA

We left the *Vendetta* just at the time when Bosco was apprised by the engineer of the break-down of the engines.

It was as nearly as possible exactly the same hour as that

at which a somewhat similar disaster occurred to the *Avenger*.

But in the latter case it was a connecting-rod which had broken : in the *Vendetta* it was a valve which had given way, involving also the bursting of a pipe.

Bosco was, as may be imagined, in a furious temper at this mishap, moreover, as a quarter of an hour later the man on the look-out cried—

“Light ho !”

“Where away ?” shouted Bosco.”

“Dead astern.”

“Ten thousand furies ! the *Avenger*, by all that’s horrible !” roared Bosco. “Engineer, if you don’t start your machinery again in a quarter of an hour, you——”

The engineer replied—

“It is impossible, capitano. I will do my best, and if you choose to murder me for that, why, I cannot help it.”

Bosco went off growling and swearing, and was met on the quarter-deck by Pedro.

“Capitano, this is a bad job.”

“Yes, it is ; we shall have to fight, I reckon ; for, if I’m not mistaken, that accursed *Avenger* is coming up astern.”

“Ah ! capitano, I am sorry for that. I am no coward, as you know—I have proved my courage in more than one tough fight—but I would rather forfeit all I have, and all I may gain by this affair, than fight now.”

“Why, what demon has put it into your head to be faint-hearted now, then ?” shouted Bosco ; “by all the fiends, if you show the white feather, so as to discourage my men, I’ll throw you overboard.”

“It was no demon, capitano,” replied Pedro, sullenly, “that put thoughts of bad luck and disaster to the *Vendetta* in my head. It was the Blessed Virgin herself,” he continued solemnly.

“Is the man mad ?” cried Bosco angrily, but still showing some interest in his voice and manner, for all Spaniards, no matter how irreligious, are more or less superstitious ; “do you mean to say that the Virgin has appeared to you ?”

“No, capitano,” replied Pedro quietly.

“Ten thousand furies ! what then has happened ?”

" You know the image of the Blessed Virgin, which stands on a bracket in my cabin ? "

" Yes."

" The sea is smooth, is it not ? "

" Yes."

" No one can enter my cabin without myself or you seeing him."

" No."

" The image of the Virgin has never before fallen from its stand ? "

" *Carambo*, no ! If it had, it must have been smashed to pieces, for it is only of plaster."

" You know the time at which the engines broke down ?

" Well, not one minute before that I saw the image slowly topple forwards, and fall to the deck, where it was smashed to a thousand pieces. It was by no mortal agency it fell."

" *Carago !*" said Bosco, and then walked away without another word, but growling to himself.

He was superstitious as to some things, and though he scoffed at religion, and would as soon hang a priest as a dog or cat, yet he believed in omens.

He paced the deck, muttering to himself for some minutes, then he called the mate.

" Pedro, not a word of this to any soul on board, as you value your life."

" I do value my life, Capitano Bosco Negro, and will fight in defence of it to the last, if fight we must."

Pedro had none of his captain's furious energy in battle, but he possessed a stubborn, sullen spirit of his own, and would fight on silently to the last, and if it came to death, would die like a hunted fox—without a cry.

" Light the battle lanterns," shouted Black Bosco presently ; and then addressing Pedro—

" It is useless to think now of escaping under cover of the darkness, the *Avenger* is in our wake, can see us, and we must fight and sink her. 'Tis better to have plenty of light, show a bold front, and get the crew in good spirits for the encounter, than to try by keeping all dark to elude this infernal vessel."

CHAPTER L V

"WE SHALL WIN YET, PEDRO."

THE *Vendetta* was soon in a blaze of light from stem to stern.

"Beat to quarters!" roared Black Bosco, getting excited himself now, as was always the case with him when a fight was imminent.

Grog was served out, and under the influence of the treble allowance of fiery spirit the negroes and Malays forming the crew of the *Vendetta* began to get uproarious.

Bosco, however, was used to them, and he took no heed of this. Anxiously he looked out astern for some sign of the pursuing vessel, the *Avenger*, the light of which he felt convinced he had seen.

It was this firm persuasion which caused him to give the order to light the battle lanterns.

Of course he did not know, as the reader does, that the *Avenger* had also broken down, and calculated that, on her approaching, the sight of the decks of the *Vendetta* lighted up, the crew at quarters, and the vessel quietly awaiting attack, as though her captain were quite confident as to the result, would produce an effect.

So when Pedro came to him and asked—

"Shall I put some more sail on her, capitano?" he said in reply—

"Has she good steerage way, answers her helm readily?"

"Yes, capitano. She is doing about two knots and a half."

"That is sufficient for fighting and manoeuvring purposes; and to attempt flight when it is impossible would be absurd, and only have the effect of disheartening our men and encouraging the enemy."

So the *Vendetta*, her crew at quarters, guns run out, and all ready for action, stood slowly on awaiting the approach of her antagonist.

An hour—two hours—three hours passed, and no signs of the *Avenger*.

The engineers were hard at work repairing the accident

to the machinery, and before long hoped to start the engines again.

Bosco began to look doubtful and puzzled. Pedro felt hopeful.

"By heavens!" cried Bosco, using his favourite oath; "I do believe she has missed us. Make all sail, Pedro, we may get clear off yet."

And in a few minutes the *Vendetta* was under every possible stitch of canvas, going with a favouring breeze at the rate of some five knots an hour.

And in a couple of hours more the engines would be ready to start again.

But what of the *Avenger*?

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE FIGHT BEGINS IN EARNEST.

Of course it was a heavy blow, a sore discouragement to the young captain of the *Avenger*, this most untoward accident to the machinery.

However, he was not one to waste time in idle regrets, but instantly gave orders to set all sail.

The breeze at this time was very light, and the vessel did not progress at a greater rate than about a knot an hour, just keeping steerage way on.

However, Blake hoped that the accident to the machinery would soon be put straight, and that at daylight the chase might be still in view, though perhaps merely a speck on the horizon.

Determined to leave nothing undone to keep within seeing distance of the *Vendetta*, Blake gave the order, "Out boats."

And soon the launch, the two cutters, and gig, well manned by a double crew, so that one half might relieve the other, were towing the *Avenger*, and increased her speed through the water from little more than one knot to over two.

All this while the *Vendetta* was idly lying to, awaiting the approach of her adversary.

Great was the surprise of Edward Blake when a brilliant light appeared ahead where all had previously been darkness.

Looking through the glass from the mast-head, he was able to make out that the decks of the *Vendetta* (if it was indeed that vessel, as he had good reason to suppose) were lighted up, and that she was, apparently, lying to in readiness for battle.

At three hours after midnight the engineer came on deck, and reported that the engine might be started, but must be worked slowly and cautiously.

Already dim gray light was apparent in the east, and in another hour night would have merged into the light of early dawn.

Jack O'Brien right cheerfully gave the order down the stoke-hole—

“Fire up, down there ! Ahead—easy with the engines !”

And the next minute the *Avenger* was once again under steam and sail.

Jack O'Brien threw up his hat in great glee.

“Hurrah, lads ! we've got her at last ! we'll be slapping it into her in another quarter of an hour. Three cheers for the *Avenger*, my boys !”

Three hearty cheers were given, and all was now excitement and anxious expectation.

At the time when the order was given to start the engines of the *Avenger*, both she and the *Vendetta* were under all sail. A tolerable brisk breeze had sprung up with the approach of day, by which, of course, both vessels profited.

At half-past four Jack O'Brien, who was here, there, and everywhere in a great state of excitement, came aft.

“She's in range, Captain Blake, my boy,” he said, “I'm sure. Shall I give the order to plump a leaden pill into her ?”

It was now daylight, but hazy, and the *Vendetta* was dimly in view ahead, apparently between two and three miles distant.

Edward Blake had a good look at her, and made his calculations.

"I think, perhaps, she is in range of the rifled Armstrong," he said ; "but we'll wait another quarter of an hour, to make certain. I'm sure we gain on her."

The expiration of the quarter of an hour was eagerly awaited by the crew, among whom the news spread that in that time the first shot was to be fired.

The gun was carefully loaded and elevated.

Then the captain, posting himself by the wheel, directed the helmsman to give her a good sheer to port.

"Ready with the gun," he cried, as she presented half her broadside to the chase.

"All ready, sir."

The flash and smoke of the gun were seen—the sharp report heard the next moment—and then the conical steel shot went booming through the air—shrieking, as it were, Woe to that object I strike !

It was observed to plunge into the sea a short distance astern of the *Vendetta*, and then apparently bent from its straight course by impact with the waters, went ricochetting along, and passed ahead of the chase on the starboard side.

"Bravo !" cried O'Brien, "we're well in range. A capital shot, but a little short. Half a degree more elevation, and we hull her next time."

The fight now began in earnest.

Several more shots were fired, and each one passed close to the *Vendetta*, some plumping into the sea close alongside.

"We must have her directly," cried O'Brien. "We'll plump one right into her stern cabin windows directly."

The *Vendetta* had by this time commenced to return the fire, and the action, though at large shots, became quite brisk.

The *Avenger* had been creeping up to the chase, and was not now much more than a mile astern—within easy artillery range.

In another quarter of an hour the broadside of the *Avenger* was presented to the *Vendetta*, and the shell guns sent their deadly missiles hurling through the air, to burst, scattering a terrible iron shower of splinters all around.

The action now became quite hot.

The *Avenger* was hit several times in the rigging, but hitherto had received no serious damage.

At half-past five, however, an unlucky shot carried away her topmast, which fell with all its rigging and hamper over the starboard side.

"Stop her," shouted Blake, "starboard your helm—one more broadside, my lads, from the starboard guns, and then all hands clear away the wreck."

This was imperatively necessary, nor was it safe to keep the engines going, lest some of the rigging of the fallen mast should foul the screw.

And so after another broadside, which did some damage, the *Avenger* fell rapidly astern and the fire on either side slackened.

Bosco, who of course could not tell what harm was done, hoped that an irretrievable disaster had happened to the enemy.

In this he was disappointed, for in less than half an hour the wreck of the topmast had been cleared away, and the *Avenger* once again tore ahead under full steam in pursuit.

"Confound her," growled Bosco, as he observed this; "here she comes again—there's no shaking her off, it seems."

CHAPTER LXVII.

"IT IS DON JOSE HIMSELF."

BLACK Bosco had good reason to curse the *Avenger*, which swift vessel clung to him like a staunch dog to a bull.

He hoped and believed that, in addition to carrying away her topmast, he had also hulled her and damaged her machinery, so as to cripple her entirely.

His chagrin then was proportionately great when he once more saw her coming on in pursuit at full speed.

The firing between the *Avenger* and the *Vendetta* had now greatly slackened. Blake was anxious to save the ammunition of the big gun, of which he had rather a short supply, and get to close quarters as quickly as possible.

He was well aware that the recoil of the heavy gun fired ahead appreciably affected the speed of his vessel.

Bosco, going on to the forecastle of his vessel, could plainly make out a steamer announced from the mast-head.

Each minute she became more plainly visible as the *Vendetta* steamed towards her, and the mist cleared away partially. Suddenly Bosco started.

“By all that’s lucky !” he cried ; “it is—Pedro, do you know that steamer ?”

The mate shook his head.

“May I burn in purgatory for ever if it is not the *Mari-tana*, Don Jose’s vessel ! What brings him ? He thinks the girl is on what I call Wedge Island.”

“Perhaps he has been there and found her not.”

“But what should bring him this way ? He could have no knowledge of the other island. Ah, *diavolo !* I know not what to think—whether this meeting at sea is good or evil for me.”

“I should say you ought to be thankful. The *Mari-tana* is heavily armed ?”

“I believe so.”

“And well manned ?”

“Doubtless.”

“Then, we can, between us, make short work of the *Avenger*,” remarked Pedro ; “sink or burn her, beyond all question, without trouble.”

“Stop her !” roared Bosco.

“Capitano,” urged Pedro, “do you wish to get within easy range of those infernal shell guns sooner than need be ; I would advise that we should steam on at full speed and lay close to Don Jose’s vessel.”

“Go ahead !” cried Bosco, and again the engines started, and the *Vendetta* progressed.

The fact was, Black Bosco was completely taken by surprise by the sudden apparition of Don Jose’s vessel in these waters. His original plan was to deceive Don Jose, keep the girl, and make the best bargain for himself that he could.

This was now knocked on the head—was impossible—for Don Jose, with an armed ship, was close by, and would, of course, demand the immediate possession of the girl.

And this demand he had the power to enforce, even if there had been no *Avenger* in hot pursuit in the case.

Bosco soon grasped the affair in all its bearings, and made up his mind how to act.

His game was now obvious enough, and he would not have been bewildered or hesitated a moment had he not been taken so utterly by surprise.

He would now play into Don Jose's hands—deliver up to him the girl, as originally intended, and take great credit to himself for the skill and daring with which he had kept the Englishman at bay.

He could easily account for not leaving the fair Giulia on the island, by saying that it was not safe—that this devil of an Englishman was cruising about, and had some suspicion as to the place where the girl was to be lauded.

Don Jose would, of course, believe this. Indeed, he could have no possible reason to doubt it, for at that very moment the *Avenger*, Captain Edward Blake, was in pursuit of him, they had been hotly engaged, and were even now hotly engaged.

Having explained this as briefly as possible to Don Jose, both the *Maritana* and the *Tendetta* would turn on the *Avenger*, and sink, burn, or blow her up, that is, if she did not succeed in finding safety by flight.

He would press for a larger reward than originally promised, on the ground of the great risk he had run, and the valour and fidelity with which he had fought for the girl on behalf of his lordship.

Black Bosco laughed aloud as he arrived at this satisfactory conclusion.

"Ha! ha! San Diavolo, my patron saint, has not yet deserted his most faithful servant," he cried in high glee. "Pedro, you see your omen of the broken Madonna has turned out a false one. San Diavolo still protects and aids his own."

"*Carago!*" replied Pedro, smiling, "thugs have certainly gone well for us. I like not at all those shells that cursed Englishman fires. And a word in your ear, capitano ; if she got to close quarters, and a few of those infernal missiles were to burst on deck, I do believe our men would run from their guns. They like them no more than I do, on my soul."

"I know it ; I have observed it," replied Bosco. "It is

as well as it is. Ah ! there goes that cursed Englishman again," he cried, as a shot from the big gun went whistling through the air not a dozen feet from their heads.

The *Vendetta* had now approached within a mile of the *Maritana*. The latter had sheered round, and was steaming very slowly in the same direction as Bosco's vessel.

"Ah ! See, they have lowered a boat!" exclaimed Pedro Bosco took the telescope and looked through it.

"It is Don Jose himself, coming on board," he said.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

GIULIA IN DON JOSE'S POWER AGAIN.

IN a very short space of time Don Jose de Malatesta stood on the deck of the *Vendetta*.

He was received by Black Bosco at the gangway with every mark of respect.

"What news, Bosco ? What is the meaning of this cannoneade, and of the shots I see dancing along the water ? What of our prize ? "

Bosco answered the last question first.

"The senorita is safe in the cabin."

"Ah !" cried Don Jose, "that is right. At last I have the proud beauty in my power. And that ship astern—what does all this mean ? "

"That vessel is the *Avenger*, commanded by an accursed Englishman, who has given me much trouble. He is pursuing me in the hope of rescuing the senorita. She is swift, this *Avenger*; faster than my ship."

"And faster than the *Maritana* ? "

"I think so."

"Then, if this Blake were to see us both bearing down to him in company, if we commenced to fire into his vessel, he might, if he were fortunate, gain safety through the superior speed of his vessel by flight."

"Your lordship is quite right. He would not, probably, venture to await an attack by our two vessels, but endeavour to escape."

"That must be prevented. His ship must be destroyed,

and the Englishman and all his crew perish without exception."

"Just so, my lord," replied Bosco, calmly, as though it were the commonest thing in the world they were speaking of, and not the wholesale slaughter of their fellow-creatures ; "the question is, what is the best and easiest way of bringing it to pass ?"

"Ah ! I have it," cried Don Jose. "I have hit upon an excellent plan. I will at once return on board the *Maritana*, taking the lady with me. It must be managed so that they cannot see on board the Englishman. That can be done, I suppose ?"

"I see no difficulty about it," replied Bosco ; "she must be securely bound, then lowered into the boat from the gangway farthest removed from the enemy. Once in the boat, she can be kept out of sight, covered over with a shawl or sail. The same precautions must be used in embarking her on board the *Maritana*, and I will guarantee that though the Englishmen have keen eyes, they will never notice the transfer."

"Good. Once on board, I will place her in safety far below the water-line ; and then we will proceed to exterminate this cursed English ship."

"I await to hear your plan, my lord."

"The instant she is safely on board, I will sheer off as though I had merely sent a boat on board to ascertain the character of your ship, and was satisfied. I will hoist the French flag, and as the Englishmen see my vessel steaming away, they will fancy that I am about to leave you to fight out your quarrel between yourselves."

A sudden thought crossed Bosco's mind. Supposing that Don Jose, having got the girl in his possession, should really steam right away, and leave him to his fate.

"I could fight, and perhaps be killed or taken," he said to himself ; "and then, again, I might haul down my flag and surrender. They would not find the girl on board, it is true, but there would be abundant proof that she had been in my power, and that she was on board this ship. I could tell them that the girl had been transferred to the *Maritana*. Would they believe me ? And if they did, would they hold me

harmless for what I had already done ? Would they let me go free ? I think not. I fancy that accnrsed Englishman would put me in irons and carry me to Havannah ; and there, when he had told his tale, I should receive bnt scant mercy. Ugh ! I do not like the look of affairs at all."

Time pressed, however ; the *Avenger* was gaining on the *Vendetta* fast, and the deadly shell from the broadside guns might soon be expected to be bursting all aronnd.

Black Bosco, though he by no means liked letting the girl go, and leaving himself at the mercy of Don Jose, who might desert him, as he feared, was powerless. By merely holding aloof, and looking on at the fight, Don Jose might compass the same end, and then, if fortune shold declare in favour of the *Avenger*, the heavier *Maritana* might attack her in turn, defeat her, and, after all, Don Jose would gain possession of the senorita.

Bosco was deadly pale and the perspiration stood on his forehead and gave his face a horribly damp, corpse-like look.

" Well, what do you say to my plan, Bosco ? "

" Excellent, your lordship."

" Come then, there is no time to be lost ; let us see about putting it in practice instantly."

Indeed it was high time, for the *Avenger* was now not more than a mile distant.

She had hoisted her flag and eased her engines, as though puzzled and uncertain what to make of the strange steamer.

It was important for the complete sncess of Don Jose's cruel plan—the death of every sonl on board the Englishman—that she shold be induced to follow up the attack on the *Vendetta* at once.

" Now, then, Bosco, send the senorita up and bundle her into the boat at once. As soon as I am on the way to the *Maritana* you had better endeavour to temporize—try and get the Englishman close on pretence of a parley, as thongh you wished to snrrender."

" Good, my lord ; I thank you for your advice."

But a deep gloom had fallen over the slave-captain.

CHAPTER LXIX.

ON BOARD THE MARITANA.

BLACK Bosco did not like the aspect of affairs, and had but little doubt as to the result.

"Ah!" he said to Pedro, "I think I can deceive the Englishman; and, happen what may, the *Avenger*, with her cursed shell guns, is doomed to destruction. Come with me, Pedro; the señorita may be sulky, in which case we shall have to carry her."

With these words he went down into the cabin, followed by Pedro.

Now it must be understood that all *this* passed in much less time than it takes for the reader to understand it.

For the *Avenger* was still closing up astern, and though for a time she had slackened speed, and no longer belched forth fire, smoke, and conical shot, yet she would in all probability commence the action again immediately.

Bosco did not find Giulia d'Almaviras so obstinate as he thought possible.

He bethought himself that she was thirsty, and so took from out of the steward's pantry a carafe of water, and carried it down with him into the cabin.

"Señorita, you must come on deck," he said; "here is water if you are thirsty."

She would have died ere she would have asked the wretch Bosco for water; but now that it was offered her, the cravings of nature asserted themselves, and taking it quickly from his hand she drank eagerly.

"You must come on deck at once, señorita," repeated Bosco.

She noticed the change in his manner—that he had suddenly become much more respectful—and for a moment or two a wild hope took possession of her—that the battle had been gained by the *Avenger*, or, at all events, that something had occurred which compelled Bosco to give her up.

Alas ! she was doomed to be undeceived, and that in a most unpleasant manner.

In reply to the order to go on deck, she bowed merely, and preceded Bosco, who motioned her to go up the companion-stairs.

She obeyed, and from the dark, gloomy cabin found herself all at once in the full light of day—the sun just rising.

Suddenly, just as she reached the waist of the vessel, Don Jose, who had been hidden from her sight by the funnel, stepped forth, and stood before her.

“Your most obedient, humble servant, señorita,” he said, with a mocking bow and smile of deadly import.

A start, a scream, and she would have fled from him—she knew not whither—as though he had been the foul fiend himself.

“Stop her, Bosco ! Into the boat with her !—there is not a moment to be lost.”

Bosco instantly grasped her by the waist, and Don Jose advancing, threw a large shawl over her head and shoulders, which he proceeded to fasten round her waist.

“For your own sake,” he said, “I advise you to submit quietly ; resistance is, I assure you, utterly out of the question. You can do yourself no good, and will only force me to more severe measures.”

He spoke quite calmly and quietly now, feeling perfectly secure in his triumph. He had at last got the prize in his possession, and in a few minutes she would be on board his ship.

A rescue then would be, as a matter of fact, an impossibility, for he considered the *Vendetta* more than a match for the *Avenger*, putting the *Maritana* entirely out of the question.

In half a minute the unfortunate Giulia d’Almaviras, now almost in a fainting state at finding herself in the power of Don Jose de Malatesta, was bundled into the boat.

In ten minutes she was on board and safely lodged in the cabin.

After giving the orders to Captain Joachim to start the engines and go ahead, as though about to leave that locality, Don Jose went below to ~~gloat over his prize.~~

The dead-lights were up, but the cabin was brilliantly lighted by oil-lamps.

The shawl had been removed from over Giulia's head and shoulders by Don Jose's orders, and when he went down into the saloon, she stood in the centre of the floor, and confronted him. So he looked at her in silence for some time.

Even he, hard-hearted and ruthless as he was, could not but feel shocked at the change which terror, grief, and ill-usage had made in her appearance.

"And, my Lord Malatesta, it is you whom I have to thank for the insult, hardships, and violence I have suffered."

"Nay, Giulia."

"Call me not Giulia, villain that you are!" she cried. "May the curses of an insulted maiden rest on you to all eternity! Don Jose de Malatesta, you shall pay for this yet."

He cowered and quailed before her just indignation—before fury which gave her strength—which fired her eye, and caused her voice to sound clear and sonorous.

"Senorita, listen to me. Let me explain. Be seated, I pray you; what I have to say will occupy some little time, and you must be weary."

CHAPTER LXX.

THE PROPHECY.

"I AM listening to you, Don Jose de Malatesta," she said, seating herself on an ottoman, and drawing the shawl around her, for her dress, torn and disordered, was scarcely decent, "but seek not to deceive me—I know much more than you suppose."

"I wonder what she does know?" thought Don Jose.

For, be it observed, there had been no time for Bosco to relate all that had occurred, or even the greater part of it.

"If you have been rudely treated, it has been against my wish—against my positive orders even."

"Ah!" cried Giulia, "then you acknowledge that you were the instigator of this villainous outrage?"

Don Jose bowed, and was about to speak when there came a cannon-shot, followed by the roar of a broadside at no great distance.

The sound somehow carried consolation—hope, even, to her heart.

"All is not lost; that noble Englishman has spoken the truth, and will save me yet. The battle begins again."

"Scoundrel!" she cried, aloud, "death by the garotte is too good for you; you should be sent to South America, and there suffer the punishment which is, I am told, reserved for the most infamous of criminals. You should be attached by the feet to wild cattle, and these sent galloping over the pampas; your wretched soul should thus find its way to Satan."

"By St. Antonio, this is going too far!" cried Don Jose, starting to his feet; "I bid you beware how you insult me!"

"I insult you! It is as impossible to insult you as it is to insult the vilest reptile that crawls! It is possible to kill, to crush you, as it is the reptile, and that is all!"

He grew pale from rage; but putting constraint on his passions, he moodily seated himself again.

"Proceed; I await until your tirade is finished,"

"Finished! I feel as though I should never tire of expressing scorn and loathing of you—of defying you to the utmost!"

"Beware! you are in my power!"

"For the present—but not for long," she replied, still in the same bold, defiant manner; "the day of reckoning—the day of vengeance has arrived. Hark to the cannon!"

Again the sound of guns was heard, and it was certain that the action was commencing again in earnest.

Don Jose began to grow impatient.

"I must put an end to this," he thought.

"Ah, bah! you think that unfortunate little steamer astern will save you."

"I think and know that the *Avenger*, Captain Edward

Blake, a noble-hearted Englishman, is the appointed instrument under Providence to rescue me and bring you to an account. Ah, believe me, Don Jose, a stern vengeance will be exacted for this outrage on the daughter of the Marquis d'Almaviras !

He started violently when he heard her mention the name of the *Avenger* and Captain Blake.

"She knows more than I supposed," he said to himself ; "but an end must be made to this, and at once. I must see to the destruction of this accursed ship and the death of all her crew.

"Your words are but as the idle wind. The *Vendetta* alone is more than a match for the *Avenger*."

"Then why did the *Vendetta* flee in terror before the nobler vessel ? No, Don Jose, I tell you that the *Avenger*, commanded by Captain Blake, and manned by an English crew, will defeat both your vessel and that of the ruffian Bosco. It is not the first time, if I remember history aright, that English ships and English men have proved victorious against greater odds !"

She spoke with the utmost confidence—like one inspired.

And now, for the first time, a feeling of doubt, of alarm even, took possession of him.

"By heavens ! it might be as she says," he thought, and his cheek paled. "But, no ; it is impossible. I will bring this interview quickly to an end ; then go on deck, order my ship to be steered alongside this insolent *Avenger*, and sink her with a broadside."

"Senorita," he said, forcing an appearance of ease and comfort he was far from feeling, "what you say is pure nonsense. This buccaneer of an Englishman has not a ghost of a chance. In an hour's time, Captain Blake, who you think is going to rescue you, will be hanging from the yard-arm by the neck."

Giulia smiled scornfully.

"Don Jose Malatesta," she said in the same stern unfaltering voice, "it will not matter. I tell you, you go to your death—*ere the sun reaches the meridian you will be a corpse* : "

With a cry, half of terror, half of rage, he rushed on deck, far more troubled in mind than was his prisoner.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SHE HAS STRUCK HER FLAG.

WHEN Don Jose reached the deck, pale, and with a strange wild look in his eyes, the sound of a salvo of guns broke on his ears.

Looking to port he beheld the *Avenger* on the larboard quarter of the *Vendetta*, and was just in time to observe the white smoke of this last broadside

"Seems to me, my lord," remarked Captain Gonzalves, "that Black Bosco has got his work to do with the Englishman. I have been watching the fight. She is coming to close quarters, and delivers her fire with excellent precision and quickness; they stand well to their guns, and work them well, these English."

"*Carrambo!*" cried Don Jose, "you do not mean to say that Bosco is getting the worst of it?"

"I think so," replied the captain, coolly; "the splinters have been flying in fine style, and moreover the *Vendetta* has been on fire once."

"Ah, *Carago!* there she goes again."

A moment or two before a shell from the *Avenger* had hulled the *Vendetta* and exploded, and was quickly followed by flame and smoke, leaping from the hatchway.

"By all the saints!" cried Don Jose, "we must go to his assistance. We must sink this cursed Englishman."

"We must be quick about it, then," replied Captain Gonzalves, "for, on my faith and honour, the *Vendetta* will be a wreck if the Englishman keeps up his fire thus."

Don Jose resolved to bear down to the assistance of Bosco, and, favoured by the battle-smoke and the mist, creep up alongside the *Avenger* unperceived, and deliver one tremendous broadside at close quarters.

This plan was at once acted upon, and the captain gave the necessary orders.

It really seemed quite feasible, for at a little distance

the two vessels so hotly engaged were completely hidden by smoke.

The fire, too, had slackened on both sides, perhaps, the captain suggested, because the combatants could not even see each other, or perhaps because the cannon had got too hot to be loaded with safety.

Be that as it may, the *Maritana*, under full steam, proceeded to make a half circle round the stern of the two vessels thus hotly engaged, nearly broadside to broadside.

And then the *Maritana* at half speed crept up so as to take a position outside the *Avenger* and deliver a broadside with deadly effect.

The *Avenger* would then be between two fires.

As the *Maritana*, after making a wide sweep astern, steamed up on the port quarter of the *Avenger*, the roar of battle which had grown faint again swelled up, and once more volumes of smoke gushed from the bulwarks of the two vessels, and jets of flame, and the not-to-be-seen but deadly missiles—bursting shells scattering death, fire and ruin around ; round shot, crashing their way through plank, bulwark, and beam ; and the murderous grape, big bullets of iron, which striking the head or body, caused almost certain death, and a limb, the loss of it, if the shock to the system did not prove fatal.

“Bosco dies hard,” remarked Don Jose’s captain, quietly ; “he will fight to the last.”

There was at this moment again a temporary lull in the fight, and it was possible to converse without shouting at the top of the voice.

“What, then,” cried Don Jose, who was in a state of wild excitement, “Bosco will be beaten by that accursed Englishman !”

“He is beaten. His ship has been on fire three times, and I guess he has great difficulty in keeping the flames under at all. A quarter of an hour ago the Englishman had the best of him, firing thrice to his twice. Now the *Avenger* fires in the ratio of more than two to one. Ah ! but they stand to their guns well, these English. I wished you had taken my advice, my lord, and in an important affair of this kind, shipped a crew all English or American.”

"Bah!" replied Don Jose, who hated the English, "Spaniards are as good seamen, as brave and more intelligent than these stupid islanders. But is it not time to open fire?" asked Don Jose, impatiently; "it is folly to look idly on while that accursed vessel is sinking the *Vendetta*."

"As you please, my lord," replied the captain, and then he passed the word forward to man the starboard battery."

"All ready with the guns?" cried Captain Gonzalves, after waiting half a minute.

"All ready."

"Fire!"

The guns of the *Maritana* then belched forth fire and smoke, round shot and grape.

For some half a minute after the broadside was delivered, it was not possible to ascertain the effect, for all three vessels were pretty well enveloped in a canopy of smoke.

This soon began to clear off, drifting lazily away to leeward.

An exclamation broke from the captain of the *Maritana*.

"What is it, captain?" asked Don Jose.

"By all the saints, it is over—it is finished!"

"What is finished?"

"Look there!" replied the captain, pointing to the mizenpeak of the *Avenger*, where a moment or two previously the British flag floated.

"She has struck her flag," said Gonzalves, "but we must be cautious, there may be some treachery in this. I cannot understand her striking after receiving only one broadside from us. It is not like the English."

Captain Gonzalves was right, and Don Jose, looking to where he pointed, saw the British ensign come slowly down from the proud position it had hitherto held.

"Cease firing," cried Captain Gonzalves, "the enemy has struck."

"No, no," shouted Don Jose, "fire away—load with round shot, and sink the accursed English buccaneer."

Then to the captain—

"Are you mad—do you not understand that the *Avenger*

must be sunk, and every soul on board perish ? Fire away at her notwithstanding she has struck."

The *Avenger* was now seen to be backing astern, and thus coming towards the *Maritana*.

As she did so she delivered a broadside at the *Vendetta*, and a cheer which immediately afterwards rang out from her crew told that this last discharge had been effective.

"Queer behaviour for a ship that has surrendered," remarked Captain Gonzalves, "I guess we'll have trouble with this fellow yet."

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE ACTION CONTINUED—THE AVENGER'S FLAG SHOT AWAY.

The *Avenger*, going astern with her rudder hard a starboard, backed away from the broadside of the *Vendetta*, and at the same time approached the *Maritana*, across the stern of which vessel she would pass in a diagonal direction.

In other words, she would be in a splendid position to deliver a raking-fire as she thus crossed the wake of Don Jose's vessel, the *Maritana*.

"Ready with the port guns," shouted Blake; "fire one by one as we come abreast of her stern-cabin windows.

The effect of this would be to sweep the decks of the *Maritana* with a most deadly fire of grape and shell, and that at only half-pistol-shot distance. It was quite possible that such would be the slaughter and havoc caused by this raking-fire on the crowded decks of the *Maritana*, that she might be put *hors de combat* at once, her men flying from their guns.

"By the Lord Harry !" cried O'Brien suddenly, "our flag's down."

"Shot away, I suppose," replied Blake; "I see the signal halyards are gone; run up the Union Jack to the foretop-mast head."

This was the explanation of the lowering of the *Avenger's* flag, which the captain of the *Maritana* thought was in token of surrender.

"Ready, number one gun, port battery," shouted Blake.
"All ready, sir."

The stern of the *Avenger* at this moment crossed the wake of the *Maritana*, and number one gun pointed right into the stern-cabin windows.

"Fire!"

The order was followed by a flash and report, and the crash and splintering of wood-work.

One of the stern cabin deadlights, or shutters, as landsmen would call them, was blown away by the discharge, and from the quarter-deck of the *Avenger* it was possible to see into the saloon of the *Maritana*, where Giulia d'Almaviras, it will be remembered, was confined.

The second gun of the *Avenger's* port broadside was now abreast of the stern windows of the *Maritana*.

The captain of the gun was about to fire, having carefully trained the piece, when Blake shouted—

"Cease firing the port guns—man the starboard battery! Stop her—go a-head with the engines."

"Eh! man alive," cried Jack, "what are you going to do? Why, we can sweep her decks, cut them down by scores, if we raze her."

"Cease firing with the port guns—man the starboard battery!" cried Blake, repeating his previous order.

Then turning to his lieutenant, he said, pointing to the stern-cabin window, of which the deadlight was demolished—

"Jack, my boy, look there, and you will see why I have given the order to cease firing."

"The señorita herself," exclaimed O'Brien, "by all that's lucky!"

And, looking as directed, Jack O'Brien could see the interior of the cabin of the *Maritana*.

And there, standing by the open port, he saw Giulia d'Almaviras.

She was pale, but calm, and there was no trace of fear in her countenance.

As the two, Blake and his lieutenant, looked, she advanced quite close to the open window, waved her hand, and smiled.

Her lips moved, and they guessed she spoke words of encouragement to them, but amidst the din it was impossible to hear what she said.

In another second or two the *Avenger* moved a-head.

Blake's orders having been obeyed, and the vision of the fair Giulia at the open port was seen no more.

"By all the saints, I was right then!" cried Jack O'Brien. "I told you I saw something hurled into the boat; and it was doubtless the *senorita*—"

"Ah! see there," he exclaimed suddenly, and in his turn pointing to the *Maritana*; "look at that man on the quarter-deck; do you recognize him?"

"Don Jose de Malatesta!" cried Blake. "I see it all now; this is his ship come to relieve Bosco of his captive. Oh, the villain! I must have a shot at him."

He ran to the mast, around which were rifles in a rack.

Seizing one of these, he aimed at Don Jose, and fired; the shot missed, and the Spaniard at the same moment perceived him.

He took off his hat, and bowed with insolent mockery, and even laughed, or pretended to laugh.

"By the holy poker, you black-muzzled villain," cried Jack O'Brien, "we'll make you laugh on the other side of your mouth before we've done with you."

"Fire!" shouted Don Jose, through the speaking trumpet—"fire, and hit the accursed Englishman. Fifty doubloons each to every man on board when we have sunk the enemy."

A cheer rang out from the crew of the *Maritana* at this munificent promise, and again her starboard battery thunders forth.

Less than a minute later the carpenter came to Captain Blake with a very solemn face—

"She's hit, sir, badly hit between wind and water; I can't get at the hole; she'll founder in about ten minutes; the water is rushing in like a cataract."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE AVENGER IN A SINKING STATE.—CAPTURE OF THE VENDETTA—DEATH OF BOSCO.

"WHAT now, captain?" cried O'Brien, coming up at that moment, "we have lost a splendid chance of totally crippling and defeating our second enemy with one broadside."

Edward Blake was now pale, and for the first time since the fight began looked anxious and gloomy.

"I am afraid our forbearance will prove our ruin," he said; "but it cannot be helped: I *could not* allow the port guns to be fired when it was almost a certainty that the señorita would have been killed by the discharge."

"What is wrong?"

"Only that, as the carpenter informs me, the *Avenger* is in a sinking state."

"The devil!" replied Jack O'Brien, "that is bad news."

He was silent for a moment or two, and then exclaimed, suddenly—

"By Saint Patrick, I have it now. You say our ship is going to sink beneath our feet?"

"I am afraid so."

"Faith then, we must just take one of the enemies. Which shall it be, that cursed *Vendetta* or the big one?"

"The *Vendetta* is almost knocked to pieces herself, and moreover, I think they have trouble in keeping the fire down."

"Then let it be Don Jose's ship here. She's bigger and better in every way."

"Fire with your port battery," shouted Blake, "but aim at the fore part of the ship. Spare the poop and quarter-deck."

Of course this forbearance on his part told most disastrously on the chance of the *Avenger*, for as Don Jose and the captain and the other officers of the *Maritana* were all aft, they were out of danger.

Blake, however, was determined that if Don Jose was fiend enough to keep the girl in a position of danger when she might have been placed in safety down the lower hold, he would not be unmanly enough to risk injuring her.

The *Vendetta* had now ceased to fire altogether for a time, but the *Maritana* poured in another discharge, principally of round-shot, which killed five men and committed terrible havoc on the decks, bulwarks, and timbers of the *Avenger*.

"This can't last, Jack," he shouted, amid the roar of the guns. "We must take the *Vendetta* by the board, and then do our best with Don Jose. Pass the word for the boarders to board the enemy from the starboard bow. If we carry the *Vendetta*, I will run her full tilt at the other one, and it

I can hit her amidships, may sink her right off. Ha! here's the carpenter again. What news?"

"I've got at the leak, sir, and if you can spare twenty men to pump, I think we may keep her afloat."

"Not now, carpenter. I can't spare a man now. I'm going to take the *Vendetta* by the board. If we succeed, then you may have twenty men. Can you keep her afloat for half an hour without pumping?"

"Aye, captain, she'll float longer than that."

"That will do then; the affair will be decided in twenty minutes. Now, Jack, ready with the boarders!"

"They're all ready, captain," cried the Irishman, "and so is Lieutenant Jack O'Brien to lead them. Hurrah, lads, for the *Avenger*," shouted the Irishman, waving his sword, "three cheers, and board her in the smoke."

"Port your helm," cried Blake, and then as the vessel a minute afterwards ran foul of the *Vendetta*, he shouted—

"Fire your starboard guns. Boarders away!"

The guns were fired, and the boarders made a rush for the forecastle and forerigging. Jack O'Brien gave a wild Irish yell, and shouting his favourite cry—

"Three cheers, and board her in the smoke," he leaped on the shattered bulwarks of the *Vendetta*, and the next moment a score of English sailors followed, cutlass and pistol in hand.

The negroes, huge giants of strength as they were, already disheartened and almost panic-stricken, made scarcely a show of resistance. There was a brief *mélée*, some pistol-shots, and then they broke and fled, some seeking safety aloft, some diving down the hold.

Bosco, however, with Pedro, and some half-score of the more determined, made a stand on the quarter-deck.

"Now, lads, never mind your pistols, boarding-pikes and cutlas-es to the front."

The Englishmen made a rush at Bosco and his men, who stood drawn up across the quarter-deck of the *Vendetta*.

Two of O'Brien's men fell shot through the body, one by Bosco, the other by Pedro. and three more were wounded less severely.

But the next moment it was a hand-to-hand conflict. Bosco cut down the nearest man to him with his sword, but a second afterwards he was impaled, an English sailor driving a boarding-pike right through his body.

With a yell of agony Black Bosco fell to the deck, writhing in the agonies of death. O'Brien, seeing the pike had gone right through his body, and protruded behind, mercifully put a pistol to his head, and blew his brains out. The rest retreated ast, crying for quarter.

"Quarter! quarter!" cried Pedro, himself badly wounded; "we surrender; mercy, good senor! mercy, I ask!"

O'Brien, seeing him endeavour to rise, placed the point of his sword to his throat. "Mercy, senor, and I can give you some information—"

"Down with your arms," shouted O'Brien to the few who had retreated, "down with your arms, and you shall have quarter."

Instantly they all threw down their arms, and the *Vendetta* was the prize of the English.

Jack O'Brien now turned his attention to Pedro, Bosco's second in command.

He had received a gash on the left shoulder, and was, moreover, wounded by a pike in the chest.

"What have you to say? speak quick, or I will put you out o' your misery as I did that ruffian, your captain."

"You will spare me—your promise!" cried the wounded man.

"Yes, only speak, don't attempt to trifl, or you are a dead man."

"I will, I will; only take me on board with you."

"Speak!"

"Get back to your ship, and haul off from the *Vendetta*, for Bosco has put a slow match to the powder-magazine. It will explode in less than five minutes, and blow us all up together."

This revelation on the part of the wounded Pedro was sufficiently alarming, and was quite enough to cause the victorious English to hasten back to their own vessel wh'ch still grappled the *Vendetta*.

As to this latter, she was in a deplorable state.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

UNEXPECTED AID.

TWELVE dead bodies, and twice as many wounded men lying about on the decks, all slippery and stained with blood, attested the severity of the *Avenger*'s fire.

Her rigging was all cut up, ropes hanging about loose, gun carriages upset, great gaps torn in the bulwarks where shells had struck and burst, and the decks splintered and torn up the whole length of the ship.

Lientenant O'Brien glanced around on this scene of ruin, and then gave the order to his men to make all haste on board the *Avenger*.

Meanwhile a desultory fire had been going on between the latter vessel and the *Maritana*, which now lay absolutely alongside the *Avenger*.

And just at the moment when the men of the *Vendetta* had thrown down their arms and surrendered, a boarding party of forty men, led by Captain Joachim Gonzalves, crowded on to the fore-part of the deck of the *Avenger*.

"Down with the English dogs!" shouted Don Jose through a speaking-trumpet, "kill and slay—no quarter—no quarter! Fifty doubloons for every dead Englishman!"

Captain Blake saw this attempt on the part of the *Maritana* to take his vessel by the board, with serious apprehension, almost dismay.

Nearly half his crew, his best men, had followed Jack O'Brien on board the *Vendetta*.

The *Vendetta* was carried, and her captain slain, but now Edward Blake beheld his own vessel invaded by the enemy, to oppose to whom he had only half a crew.

The men of the *Maritana* were double in number to the crew of the *Avenger*, and with a part of his men absent Captain Blake beheld himself attacked by overwhelming odds.

"All hands repel boarders," he shouted; and then proceeded to hail O'Brien, who was still on board the *Avenger*, seeing to his wounded men being transhipped to the *Avenger* before following himself with the rest of his men.

"*Vendetta*, ahoy!"

"Hallo!"

"All hands to the *Avenger*. We are boarded on the port bow.

Meanwhile, some of the grappling-hooks had become detached, and the *Avenger* swung away forward from the *Vendetta*.

This made the task of getting back on board their own ship more difficult to the Englishmen, especially as they were encumbered with five wounded men—four of their own party, and Pedro, whom O'Brien had promised his life should be spared.

It was fully five minutes from the time when Pedro gave the warning before O'Brien and his men had regained the *Avenger*.

A desperate fight was going on on aboard the latter vessel.

Blake had got his men aft, and now desperately disputed every foot of ground with the foe, who pressed on, yelling, shouting, and firing their pistols.

"Charge them, my lads," shouted the young commander. "Give them cold steel. Pikes and cutlasses, follow me. Hurrah for the *Avenger*!"

Then, waving his sword, he made a dash at the enemy, and crossed swords, with the captain of the *Maritana* himself, whom he succeeded in wounding in the sword-arm.

He was loyally followed by his men, who, with a loud cheer, charged the Spaniards and drove them back.

But at this moment a deadly fire of musketry was opened on the English from the *Maritana*, the bulwarks of the latter being crowded with men, armed with rifles.

Five of Blake's men fell under this terrible fire, and the English were forced to retreat, taking their wounded with them.

Blake now ran some guns in from the port and extemporised a sort of barricade, behind which he hoped to keep the enemy at bay.

Matters were now, however, extremely critical—indeed, desperate.

The *Avenger* had, it is true, made a wreck of the *Vendetta*, and O'Brien's boarding party had gallantly taken Bosco's ship by storm.

But the *Avenger* herself was as bad hit between wind and water, leaking fast, almost in a sinking state, she was now boarded in turn by a party from the *Maritana*, more numerous than the whole crew, while others kept up a destructive musketry fire from Don Jose's vessel.

O'Brien, with his men, joined Blake at this critical time.

This welcome reinforcement gave Blake and his men fresh hope and courage.

"Now, lads! Now, O'Brien, let's give them another charge, drive them overboard, and then trust to our broadside guns."

"Hold!" cried O'Brien. "Cast off from the *Vendetta* first."

"Hang the *Vendetta*!" shouted Blake, excitedly. "She's a wreck, and we need not trouble about her."

"But we must, Captain Blake," O'Brien shouted in reply, "Bosco has put a slow match to her powder-magazine."

It was fully a minute before the grappling-hooks could be cast off, and the *Avenger* cleared of the *Vendetta*.

"Go ahead with the engines!" roared Blake through the speaking-trumpet.

The *Avenger* was fast to the *Maritana*, so when she went a-head she dragged the latter vessel with her.

Don Jose's vessel and that of Blake, locked together in a deadly embrace, were soon clear of the *Vendetta*.

Seeking shelter as much as possible behind the hastily thrown up barricade, Blake ordered his men to keep up a slow fire on the Spaniards, who held the fore-part of the deck.

Meanwhile, the riflemen on board the *Maritana*, who had now got into the rigging and the tops of the vessel, did fearful havoc among the little party of Englishmen.

Ten men were already dead or wounded, and each minute some one was hit.

It was impossible to get under shelter from the fire of the rifles, as the deck of the *Avenger* was completely commanded from the tops and rigging of the *Maritana*.

"O'Brien, my boy, this can't last," said Blake, to his friend: "see, they are turning some of the forward guns on us."

This was unfortunately too true.

The Spaniards held the whole fore-part of the deck, and having run in some of the guns, were proceeding to load and point them towards the little band of Englishmen.

"They'll smash up the barricade at the first discharge," said O'Brien. "We're done for, Blake, my boy."

"It is the fortune of war," replied the captain of the *Avenger*. "There is one chance left. We must charge them, and at all events, can but die sword in hand. Hark to what the scoundrel, Don Jose, is shouting. We can expect no mercy."

"Death to the English!" Don Jose was roaring through the speaking-trumpet from the poop of the *Maritana*; "kill them all—no quarter! Fifty doubloons for every dead Englishman!"

"Now, my lads," cried Blake, addressing his men, "we are about to charge the enemy. It is our only chance. It is useless standing here to be picked off one by one. Follow me, lads. Death or glory. Hurrah for the *Avenger*!"

As he finished, the Englishmen cheered, and closing up together, made ready to charge in a body—the men with the boarding-pikes in the front rank.

But the cheer from the men of the *Avenger* was almost instantly followed by another—a shout from many voices, certainly not of Spaniards. And then was heard the roar of big guns, followed by a rattling volley of musketry.

"What the devil is that?" cried O'Brien.

"We're saved—we're saved!" shouted Blake; "a strange ship has come to our aid, and is firing into the Spaniard on the other side."

This was a fact.

Through the smoke the masts and funnel of a big ship could be discerned; her bulwarks and rigging crowded with men who were loading and firing as rapidly as possible into the *Maritana*."

"Hurrah, lads! Charge! Follow me, and drive the dons overboard."

And then, led by Blake, the Englishmen leaped over the barricade, and rushed at the Spaniards.

CHAPTER LXXV

BLOOD'S THICKER THAN WATER.

OF late we have lost sight of the American frigate, the *Rapidan*, and it is time we had a look at her and her proceedings.

We left her in sight of the two vessels, the *Avenger* and the *Vendetta*, her captain eagerly watching the affair, and so manœuvring the vessel, as to keep out of view as much as possible, and yet still be able to watch the fight.

"Snakes and glory!" said the first lieutenant to the captain, "I do hope that cussed pirate will get licked by the Britisher!"

"I reckon that's about a certain fact," remarked the captain : "the Englishman fires quicker and truer a darned sight, and he's plumping live shell into him instead of cold shot."

"There goes a blaze and smoke ; reckon she's on fire, that *Vendetta*."

"And a darned good job too, the piratical scoundrel, to go kidnapping a poor girl. I hope the Britisher will blow him right bang to pieces. I'd like to have a slap at him myself, if it warn't for duty, and that lies in the way of overhauling that cursed rebel pirate, the *Turtle Dove*."

"But," said the mate, with a half-smile and a twinkle in his eye, "I thought you had settled her business, sunk her to the bottom of the sea."

"Ah ! that was in my dreams. Not but what it'll come true enough if ever I do get broadside to broadside with her. Twenty minutes I give her, and then down she goes head first, just as I saw her in my dream."

"Jerusalem !" exclaimed the lieutenant, "if there ain't another ship a-crawling up round the sterns of the two fighting."

The *Avenger* and the *Vendetta* were now nearly broadside to broadside, and the *Maritana*, unseen by either, was coming up on the port quarter of the English vessel.

"Snakes and thunder !" cried the Yankee captain. "Now I do wonder what that ship's after."

"Seems to me as though she meant to join in the mess."

A minute or so afterwards the intentions of the third vessel were sufficiently apparent, for from the deck of the frigate she was seen to fire a broadside into the *Avenger*.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the mate, "the Britisher will get pepper now, I guess."

"Two to one," said the captain; "seems to me now, that ain't kinder quite fair."

"Nohow you can fix it, cap'n."

"See here, Mister Lieutenant; seems to me now, that *Vendetta* ain't much belter than a darned pirate."

"Nary bit, cap'in."

"And that other ship that's just come to help her, and has opened fire on the Britisher, ain't much better."

"Not a darned bit."

"Seems to me, Mister Lieutenant, that we'll hanl up a bit closer to where the fighting's going on. Start the engines and steer round the stern of all three vessels, so as to take up a position outside all on the port broadside of this last ship that's come up."

"Right you are, cap'n."

"Just so, mister. Well, I reckon I'll dive down and finish my breakfast. Let me know when we're about fifty yards off on the port broadside of the strange ship."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the mate, and then gave the necessary orders to the helmsman and to the engineer to go ahead with the engines.

Imitating the manœuvre of the *Maritana*, the Yankee frigate proceeded to make a wide sweep round the stern of the three vessels now all hotly engaged.

And like the *Maritana*, she was able to approach without being observed from either of the three ships.

The attention of all hands on each ship was fully occupied with the immediate enemy, and favoured also by the clouds of smoke caused by such a cannonade, the Yankee frigate took up a position, a little on the port quarter of the *Maritana*, and distant less than a hundred fathoms.

The lieutenant in command now stopped the engines, and called the captain, who hurried on deck, and rapidly took in the state of affairs.

"Seems to me that the Britisher's getting the worst of it," he remarked.

"Certain sure."

"She's beat the cursed pirate on the outside—knocked her into a cocked hat, took by the board, and altogether given her immortal smash."

"That's a certain fact, cap'n."

"And here's this t'other craft, her consort—another cursed pirate, I reckon—come up and double-banked her."

"That's so."

"The Britisher can't hold out against such odds. She's bound to cave in."

"That's so."

"Seems to me, mister, that ain't altogether right and square."

"Nohow you can fix it," replied the lieutenant.

"I guess it's no business of ours."

"Right you are, cap'n."

"But I should like to have a slap at this fellow there. I do hate those yellow-faced dons."

"Same here."

"We're cruising in these waters to overhaul and capture the *Turtle Dove*."

"That's a fact."

"And neither of these two vessels ain't the *Turtle Dove*.

"No."

"Man the starboard battery, and get riflemen and marines all ready in the waist," said the Yankee captain, quietly. "and come and report to me when you've done so."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the mate, with great alacrity.

Meanwhile the fight was progressing, as described in the last chapter, and the *Avenger* was getting the worst of it ; so much so, that it was obvious she could not long hold out, but must be sunk or captured by the *Maritana*.

The Yankee captain watched the desperate struggle with intense interest.

"They fight hard, those Britishers," he muttered, "but they must be licked—must cave in."

"All ready with the starboard guns, and the small-arms men," the lieutenant reported.

"Look here, mister," said the Yankee captain, "our

business is with the *Turtle Dove* when we can catch her, ain't it?"

"That's so, cap'n."

"Guess Uncle Sam didn't send us out to these seas to fight on our own hook."

"Nary bit."

"Guess we ain't got no business to interfere with this here vessel as is smashing up the Britisher."

"That's right."

"But she's a pirate—the consort of that other pirate."

"That's so."

"And she ought to have it hot and strong."

"Serve her right," replied the lieutenant.

"And I'm blowed if she shan't," cried the captain, raising his voice. "Blood's thicker than water ! Slap into her, lads ! Fire with big guns and small arms ! Let her have it ! Hurrah for the *Rapidan*!"

And then the Yankee frigate went into the fight, and with tremendous effect.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

DEATH OF DON JOSE DE MALATESTA.

THE appearance of the *Rapidan* on the scene was indeed a case of *Deus ex machina* for the *Avenger*.

We left Captain Blake and his little band on the point of charging the Spaniards who held possession of the fore-part of the deck.

It was nothing but a forlorn hope—a last desperate chance ; and in his heart Blake counted success as almost impossible.

But the roaring guns and the rattling musketry-fire from the Yankee put quite a different complexion on the state of affairs.

The men of the *Maritana* were almost instantly thrown into a state of panic, some running below, others rushing to and fro in a state of wild confusion.

As for those who had boarded the *Avenger*, they quickly began to clamber on board their own ship, not waiting for the Englishmen to charge.

"Thunder and furies!" cried Don Jose, furiously, when he saw the battle going against him, and perceived the crew in a state of panic-terror, and no fight left in them; "what is the meaning of this?"

"We are overmatched," answered the captain; "our only chance is escape!"

"Escape, then, by all means; send her ahead full speed!" cried Don Jose.

"Cast off the grapnels!" shouted Captain Gonzalvez, "and go ahead."

But to get clear of the *Avenger* was not an easy thing.

Blake and his men having driven the Spaniards from the fore-part of the vessel, now prepared in turn to board the *Maritana*.

The young commander was hastened in this step by learning from the carpenter that the little vessel was filling and settling down fast.

"Boarders away!" cried Blake; and then he and O'Brien clambered on to the bulwarks of the *Avenger*, and in a few moments more had leaped on board the *Maritana*, the crew swarming after them.

Both vessels were now clear of the *Vendetta*, having gone ahead fully two hundred yards.

The *Rapidan* remained calmly where she was, and ceased firing, her captain being fully satisfied with the effect the first fire and volley of musketry had produced.

"Guess the Britishers can settle the business themselves now, Mister Lieutenant," he said.

"Guess they have settled it," replied that officer. "The dons have run from their guns, scattered like a flock of sheep before the wolves."

"All hands on board this ship!" shouted Blake to such of his men who still remained on board the other, "the *Avenger* is sinking."

The instant every man had left Blake's vessel, he gave the order to cast off the grapping-irons, and to cut all ropes which held the two ships together.

The engines of the *Maritana* were still working, while the *Avenger's* had been stopped.

Consequently, the *Maritana*, disengaged from the other

vessel, went ahead, and was soon a quarter of a mile distant from the other three.

The *Vendetta* was on fire, the *Avenger* sinking, while the Yankee man-of-war lay-to, looking on.

Meanwhile, although there was by no means a desperate resistance on the part of the Spaniards, the vessel was not gained without the interchange of a good many shots and the clashing of cutlasses.

"Surrender!" shouted Blake, in Spanish, "and your lives shall be spared. Down with your arms!"

This order was obeyed, the Spaniards, after a few more shots, suddenly throwing down their weapons.

Blake, whose thoughts were on the captive girl in the cabin, and for whose safety he had great fears, hastily gave orders to his officers to see to the disarming and making secure of the Spanish crew.

Then he himself, sword in hand, went down into the cabin, followed only by Jack O'Brien.

A cry of joy from the fair Giulia herself apprised him that she was alive and safe, and next his eyes fell on Don Jose de Malatesta, who stood like a tiger at bay, with glaring eyeballs, altogether a picture of a baffled and defeated villain.

He knew not what would be his fate, but had no reason to expect any mercy from the conquerors, or from the Spanish authorities should he be given up to them, urged as they would be to inflict on him the utmost penalty of the law, by the Marquis d'Almaviras and the rest of Giulia's friends.

Blake's blood was now thoroughly up. He felt the excitement of the strife, the battle fury was on him, and he longed to cross swords with the villain who stood half cowed—sullen, but still with a remnant of insolent defiance in his face and bearing.

"Don Jose de Malatesta! Thief—traitor—villain! at last I have you; defend yourself!"

Both were armed with swords, and Blake advancing, vigorously they crossed blades.

"Stand back, O'Brien," cried Blake; "villain as he is, I will give him fair play—let him fight for his life—yes, your

life, Don Jose," he added, pressing him harder and harder ; " it is for your life you are fighting."

The Spaniard at this moment warded off a fierce cut at the head, and Blake, not recovering himself soon enough after the blow, Don Jose was able to inflict a flesh wound on the right arm of his antagonist. Giulia, spectator of this duel, gave a faint cry as she saw her champion wounded.

A moment or two afterwards she shrieked aloud, and hid her eyes with her hands.

Blake, infuriated by the pain of the wound, made a fierce assault on Don Jose.

One cut the latter warded off, one thrust he parried, but the next instant Blake's sword flashed beneath his antagonist's guard, the keen blue steel going hissing right through the body of the Spanish nobleman.

The thrust was so vigorously and fiercely delivered, that the hilt of the sword came thump against Don Jose's breast, and with a groan he fell to the deck, writhing in the agonies of death.

"So perish all such treacherous villains!" said Blake, quietly withdrawing his sword from the still breathing body. "Senorita Giulia d'Almaviras, allow me to congratulate you on the issue of the fight. Your enemy is dead, and you are safe in the hands of friends, who will dispose of you as you may think fit."

She offered her hand, unable to speak from excitement and emotion.

The next instant there was a flash of lurid fire, followed by a great roar.

EPILOGUE

SOME few weeks have elapsed since the memorable sea-fight in which the four vessels—the *Avenger*, the *L'endetta*, the *Maritana*, and *Rapidan*—were engaged, in which the two former were destroyed.

It is evening—one of those clear, starlight nights only to be witnessed in the tropics.

There is high festival at the Villa Castelmarina, the country house of the Marquis d'Almaviras.

There is a grand gala to celebrate the recovery of his daughter, and in honour of her deliverer, the gallant Englishman, Edward Blake, who, on this night, is the hero of the hour, the observed of all observers.

Myriads of coloured lights, with which every tree and every shrub in the beautiful and spacious gardens are plentifully sprinkled, have the effect of almost turning night into day, so far as illumination is concerned.

Most of the ships in the bay are also lighted up in honour of the event, for the marquis is very wealthy, besides commanding great influence and respect, and all Havannah just at this time is ringing with the news of the abduction of his daughter, her rescue by the Englishman, Blake, the death of Don Jose de Malatesta, the instigator of the outrage ; also the story of the sea-fight between the *Avenger*, the *Vendetta*, and the *Maritana* ; and the destruction of one and capture of the last has been told over and over again in many a posada and café.

Scores of boats, too, dot the placid surface of the bay, each carrying several lights, and altogether the scene is a most beautiful and striking one.

The Villa Castelmarina itself is a blaze of light from basement to roof, and around this centre, like stars and planets about a central sun, the illumination of the gardens and bay itself spreads gradually, becoming fainter and fainter, till, in the far distance, the lights of the boats twinkle like little stars on the surface of the calm sea.

It has been arranged that a grand display of fireworks from boats and small vessels moored a short distance from the end of the gardens, the soft turf of which slopes down to the sea, shall commence the festivities.

A splendid band playing the national anthem of England, out of compliment to Edward Blake, is the signal that the fireworks are about to commence.

The guests, who were assembled in the grand saloon, and promenading about the spacious corridors and other chambers, hastened out into the grounds to witness the display.

The fireworks were of the most elaborate description, no expense having been spared to render the affair as splendid and perfect as possible,

The display was to conclude with an explosion on a grand scale.

The *Maritana*, so gallantly captured by Edward Blake and his brave crew, was to be blown up at a given signal.

She was moored about half a mile from the shore, and a clear space was kept all around her for a circuit of about five hundred yards, so that no damage might be done by falling fragments.

A rocket shooting up to the sky from one of the balconies of the Villa Castelmariua was the first signal.

Instantly red and blue lights blazed out all over the ship, and her hull and spars were plainly visible.

Then a boat was observed rapidly rowing away from her, and in a short time it was seen that she was on fire in various places.

Barrels of tar and turpentine and other combustibles had been purposely spilled over her decks, so that in a very short space of time the fire burned furiously and the vessel was enveloped in a sheet of flame.

One by one, with a great crash, the masts and funnels fell, and all now looked forward to the grand blow-up, which might be expected at any moment.

At last, after some minutes of anxious suspense, a great flash and then a vast jet of flame is seen to shoot upwards to the sky.

Then suddenly there is a great canopy of smoke followed by the dull roar of the explosion.

And then, save for the burning fragments, which fall hurtling through the air, and into the sea, all is dark where the vessel lay.

Such was the well-merited end of another of the three ships engaged in the great seafight we have described.

The *Vendetta*, the *Avenger*, and now the *Maritana*, have all been sunk or destroyed; the two first in the course of the stirring adventures we have described, the latter as a manifestation of the joy of the marquis, and a celebration of the triumph of right over wrong in the rescue of the lovely Giulia d'Almaviras and the death of the villain Don Jose.

* * * * *

After the blow-up of the *Maritana*, which concluded the

display of fireworks, most of the guests sought the grand saloon, where the magnificent orchestra of the opera, lent specially for this occasion, performed dance music.

Some, however, preferred to stroll about the smooth gravel walks of the grounds, bordered by orange and citron trees and choice shrubs, and sloping gently down to the sea which rippled on the shore.

There is no moon, but the myriads of variegated lamps, hung in every possible place, give ample light.

The air is soft and balmy, and laden with the scent of orange, jessamine, and many other flowers with which the gardens of the Villa Castelmarina abound.

Amongst those who prefer the quiet and tranquil enjoyment of a stroll about the beautiful grounds, are two couples to whom we wish to draw the reader's attention.

The first are Edward Blake and Giulia d'Almaviras—the gazelle rescued from the very jaws of the tiger.

The other couple, by no means following closely to the first, keeping always at a good distance, so as to be out of earshot, are John O'Brien and Giulia's fair American friend, Ethelinda Verinder.

Whatever may be the case with Blake and the senorita Giulia, it is abundantly evident that the Irishman has plenty to say, for, in fact, he is urging his suit with all the impulsive ness and engery of his nature.

Not yet recovered from the effects of the wounds received during the cruise for the rescue of the marquis's daughter, he is yet able to make love in a most vehement, almost audacious, manner, to his lovely companion.

Let us listen to a little of the conversation, just the wind up of it.

"Ah, now, Miss Verinder, you will be reasonable, I am sure."

"Reasonable," replied the young lady, laughing, and yet evidently not dislpcascd, "I think I am a great deal too reasonable. You certainly are a most audacious suitor."

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,' " remarked O'Brien.

"That may be ; but it by no means follows that a mad cap naval officer, no matter how brave his heart may be, shoud

carry by storm every lady whom he may choose to honour with his addresses."

"But, see here, Miss Verinder," urged O'Brien ; "if you won't have me, I shall just go right away from this place, and so will my friend Blake, I'm sure. And what would you do then, I'd like to know, if you were abducted like the senorita, your friend ? Where would you find two such fine fellows as myself and Ned Blake to take the sea and rescue you ?"

"Upon my word, Mr. O'Brien, you speak of my being abducted as though it was a very common thing here ; indeed, almost to be expected."

"Common or uncommon, we're the boys who will see you safe through that or any other danger, and will make your enemies smart for any injury they may attempt against you."

"I don't doubt either your will, courage, or determination, Mr. O'Brien," said the young lady, rather seriously.

"That's right," pursued O'Brien, pushing his advantage : "then just say the few words I want you to."

"No, no, I cannot."

"Ah ! but you will now, just to oblige me," he urged, taking her hand, which she allowed him to hold unresistingly.

"You are an English naval officer, and I have made a vow to myself that I will never marry an Englishwoman."

"I am not an Englishman, but an Irishman."

"No matter ; you are a British subject."

"I will get myself naturalized in the United States."

"You are an English naval officer."

"No, I have thrown up my commission."

"Oh ! dear, oh ! dear ; was there ever such a man ? I declare you are the most indefatigable tormentor I ever met or heard of."

"Then, just say what I ask you, and I'll torment you no more."

As he spoke, he took her other hand, and now held her prisoner by both, looking her in the eyes in the most impassioned manner.

"Leave go my hands, sir."

"Not until you say what I wish."

"Mr. O'Brien, this is too bad of you. Release my hands."

"Ah! Miss Verinder, say but the few words I want; it is so little trouble to you. Just one sentence."

"What is it you wish me to say?"

"That you accept of my proposals."

"Well, I will think about it. There, now let go my hands."

He did so, satisfied with having elicited thus much from the young lady.

For who does not know what a woman means in her heart when she says she will think about entertaining any proposal?

"She who hesitates is lost," was true in this case, so far as this, that in agreeing to "think about," Ethelinda Verinder virtually promised to lend a favourable ear to, Jack O'Brien's bold suit.

Meanwhile the other couple, Edward Blake and the lovely Giulia d'Almaviras, were not a whit less earnestly, we may even say agreeably, engaged.

They were evidently on the most friendly terms, she leaning on his arm, and looking in his face ever and anon, with an expression on her beautiful features which a greater saint than St. Anthony could never have withstood.

"And now, Giulia," said the young man, "I am coming to something else. I have listened to your praises, your flattering words, your expressions of gratitude for the service I was fortune enough to render you, till I feel quite ashamed. You must not think that I did what I did, risked what I did, unselfishly, without hope of reward."

"What reward?" she asked, looking a little surprised, for she had thought that this gallant Englishman—a very hero of romance in her eyes—was above all mercenary motives.

"You are lovely, Giulia d'Almaviras, the most beautiful girl in this island."

"I have heard so," she said, casting down her eyes.

"Your father is very rich, and you will be the most wealthy heiress in the island."

"I believe so," she replied, looking up.

"Well, I made a bargain with your father."

"What was its nature?"

He took a paper from his pocket book and handed it to her.
It was in her father's hand-writing, and ran thus—

"I do hereby promise on my word of honour as a Spaish noble, that in the event of Lieutenant Edward Blake, late of the British Navy, rescuing my daughter from her abductors, and restoring her to me, that I will give him her hand in marriage, with a suitable dowry—not less than ten thousand gold doubloons—and should my said daughter be unwilling, I will lay my commands on her to redeem her father's plighted word and bestow h r hand on the said Edward Blake.

"Signed, D'ALMAVIRAS."

She looked at him with surprise, not unmixed with horror.

"And you actually bargained with my father for my h nd, and even as to the amount of my dowry?"

"So it seems," he replied shortly.

"And you will hold my father to his word, whether I am willing or not."

"I did not say so."

"What, then, will you do?"

"I will release your father from his promise thus."

And with the words he tore the document in two and handed the pieces to her.

"And you do not wish the contract you made with my father carried out?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"Oh, yes, I do, with regard to yourself, most earnestly, always provided it is with your consent. But as to the dowry, I care nothing for that. I love you, Giulia, and not your wealth."

Her eyes beamed with pleasure, and she smiled sweetly on him.

"I will give you my answer in an hour's time. Meet me in the grand saloon."

* * * * *

He was there punctually to the appointed time, and had not long to wait before she appeared with her father.

Leaving the marquis, she hastened up to Blake, and, taking him by the hand, led him up to the old noble.

"Father," she said, "this gentleman had a contract with you concerning me."

"Yes, my child, a contract which must be performed, for the word of a Spanish hidalgo is sacred."

"But, father, this gentleman, in the most honourable manner, has consented to forego his claim, and in proof thereof has torn up and handed to me the document you signed."

"Ha!" cried the marquis joyfully, "then you are free!"

"I am; but I shall not long remain so."

"I do not understand."

"I will explain," pursued the lovely girl, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushed with pleasurable excitement. "You and all know what this noble Englishman risked for me, how he saved me at the imminent peril of his own life. Although he foregoes his claim as a matter of right, he is still an aspirant for my hand. On my own behalf, I renew the contract which you, my father, made. Edward Blake," she said, turning to our hero, and extending her hand in the presence of all the assembly, and speaking in a clear, audible voice, "you have won my heart, take my hand."

He raised it to his lips, kissed it respectfully, and then placing her arm in his, the happy lovers strolled out into the open air.

* * * * *

We have little more to say. The affair causing the court-martial was submitted to the Lords of the Admiralty in its true light, the verdict and sentence were reversed, and he was honourably reinstated in his former position.

His grandfather died soon after, and having become reconciled to the young officer, left him his estates.

He was now Sir Edward Blake, and was not dependent on the fortune of the lovely Giulia, the Star of Andalusia, whom he shortly afterwards married.

Jack O'Brien did the same by Ethelinda Verinder, and now wishing them all success and blooming children—both boys and girls—we will close this story of the

AVENGER AND THE VENDETTA.

THE FUGITIVE CAVALIER.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH FORMS THE PROLOGUE TO OUR STORY.

THAT steam-vomiting monster, the steam-engine, now rushes screaming along over the spot where the peaceful village of Mossville once stood, and naught remains to mark the spot but the ivy-covered ruins of a church tower.

The last building, except the church, to defy time, weather, and modern notions, was an old inn, the posting-place where the coach stopped to change horses, and hungry travellers alighted to refresh themselves, and exercise their cramped limbs.

The “Crown and Sceptre”—for that was its sign—had none of the appearance of the inns to which we are accustomed now-a-days. It had no ugly red-brick front, with cold, glaring windows. No: the exterior of the “Crown and Sceptre” had the appearance of offering comfort, and invited the passer-by to walk within and rest.

Perhaps no house ever built could boast of so many angles and gables; but we may vouch for the fact that never a house was built in so odd a style since the Deluge.

It had rooms so large that half a dozen candles looked like stars on a misty night.

These were fitted up with huge screens fantastically ornamented, to shut out the dreary waste of oaken panel, and make comfortable apartments near the fire.

The “Crown and Sceptre” could also boast of a state-room and bed-chamber, in which it was said royalty had ate, drank, and slept; therefore it may be concluded that such an establishment could not stand without a share of superstitious lore being attached to it.

Of course the place was haunted—if not, why should the wind take such a fancy to its old corridors and rooms, and go moaning up and down, in and out, in a restless manner, long after all was still without ; and who can account for the noises heard by the servants at night, of heavy footsteps on the stairs, the rattling of chains, and stifled groans in the stillness of the night ?

It was towards the close of the eighteenth day of June, 1645, that a party of gaily-dressed Cavaliers, six in number, rode slowly up the hill on the summit of which stood the hostelry of which we have been speaking.

The appearance of the horses and men themselves denoted that they had travelled in haste. Their steeds were covered with foam, and the men with dust.

“At last !” said the foremost, a fine-looking gentleman of about forty years. “At last we are in Mossville again. I little thought, Granville,” he said, turning and speaking to the nearest, “that I should ever see the place again.”

“Nor I, Sir Ingram Halliday,” returned the Cavalier addressed ; “nor is it with feelings of pleasure that I enter, as we return from the field beaten and disgraced, our king a fugitive, and we like hunted deer with the blood-hounds on our track.”

“Tut, Granville !” returned Sir Ingram ; “there is light and shade to every picture. Grant that the king’s followers have been beaten—ignominiously beaten if thou wilt—but dost thou not think the royal standard will be unfurled again ? Aye, Granville, and the glory of his poor, scattered army redeemed !”

“I would that I could think so,” returned the other, sadly ; “but be it as it may, it is useless to give way to despair. I will hope for the best, and gladly unsheathe my sword again at the first opportunity.”

They were now opposite the “Crown and Sceptre,” and John Barton, the landlord, standing in the porch, saluted Sir Ingram Halliday.

“Thou hast heard the news, honest John ?” said the knight, returning the salute.

"Marry ! an' I have not," returned John Barton. "God grant that it may be good !"

"I would that I could confirm thy wish !" said Sir Ingram. "The tidings are of the worst. The king's army was broken up at Naseby, and his majesty himself is now a fugitive."

"God save him !" said John, sadly. "I fear, Sir Ingram, that such folk as I will fare badly in the hands of the Puritans."

"Keep a good heart," returned Sir Ingram. "The king is yet alive, and there are many yet willing to serve him. Farewell. Shouldst thou hear news upon which thou canst rely, send it me, for I must away to the Hall to prepare for its defence."

The landlord of the inn stood gazing at the retreating forms of the Cavaliers until they were lost in the winding of the road, and then, turning to the knot of people who had gathered round the inn, attracted by the sight of the Cavaliers, said—

"Now, cry ye mercy, ye people of Mossville," he said ; "for the king—confound his enemies !—is defeated again. Marry ! we shall soon have the wolves here. Such fat lands and full orchards as Mossville contains have not escaped their hawkish eyes. Zooks ! what are we to expect when these free-thinking, hypocritical Roundheads are not content with defeating the king's army, but are hunting them down, and slaughtering them, as if they were so many dogs ? What will become of us, I ask."

"But, Master Barton," cried a voice, "Cromwell has proclaimed that he bears no personal animosity against either the king or his followers : but what he does is for the people's good. He is not accountable for the deeds of his officers."

"Zounds !" returned John ; "the sheep has little cause to ask the name of his butcher when the knife is in his throat."

"Thou art right, honest John," replied another from the crowd ; "Cromwell seeks his own aggrandisement as much as the good of the nation. He would make a footstool of the crown, and wear it afterwards."

"Give me thy hand, Master Watkins," said mine host, "for thou art as honest a man as ever crossed the threshold of the 'Crown and Sceptre.'"

John was about to seize the proffered hand, when a murmuring arose among the people, increasing to a cry of—

" Soldiers ! soldiers ! "

Shading his eyes with his hand, John Barton gazed in the direction indicated, and, as he did so, his rubicund face paled.

"Now, hang me on my own sign !" he cried, "but we are undone ; for, as I live, a body of Oliver Cromwell's heavy cavalry are crossing the hill. But it proves the old saying, that if you talk of the devil, either he or one of his imps will appear ; and this time he has sent a hundred to prove the old adage. Sir Ingram will be too late."

Covered with dust, with sunburnt features, and other signs of travel upon them, a troop of Roundhead cavalry rode slowly towards the peaceful village of Mossville.

They were evidently, by their appearance, all picked men, and those who had seen rough service.

Clad in buff coats, large, loose hose of calf-skin, steel caps and corslets, and armed with long, heavy swords and a pair of heavy pistols, they looked very warlike.

At their head rode two persons : one, by his uniform, announced himself as the captain or commander of the troop—a man of middle stature, his figure thickly set, a pair of jet black eyes, and a grizzly beard to match ; the other—a long, thin, greasy-looking individual, mounted on a bony horse, which well matched his lank, ungainly figure.

He was clad in a long garment of sad-coloured brown, to which was attached a collar of plain linen ; black hose, and a pair of shoes with black rosettes.

"We are expected, I see," said the officer in command, turning to his strange companion. "So much the better ; for, souds ! they must play us no pranks, or, by our mighty general, Cromwell—perish his enemies !——"

"Amen !" interrupted the Roundhead, in a sepulchral, twanging tone, turning up his eyes until only the whites were visible.

"They shall know what cold steel and lead mean," continued the officer. "I have the warrant, and will act upon it to the letter."

"Ay, ay ! worthy Master Goodall," returned the Round-head ; but nothing must be done rashly ; remember that I——"

"Have found favour in Cromwell's eyes, and had the luck to fall into a good estate," interrupted the officer, smiling grimly. "Fear not, Jabez Carter: nothing shall be done until the Royalist rats are driven from their homes, and you settled quietly down. But, beshrew me ! these country bumpkins, who would lick the dust from the shoes of their present master, Sir Ingram Halliday, will do the same for thee in a month's time."

"Is it your intention to stop in the village ?" asked Carter.

"Yes," returned Goodall ; "both men and horses are tired. An hour or two will make little difference."

"As thou wilt," replied Carter ; "but let us not betray our errand, for these country folk are devoted to their master, and might show their devotion by attacking us."

"Pshaw !" said the captain, "thou canst know but little of the lower classes. But here is an inn, an' if I am not mistaken, contains enough provender for our band. What ho, there, sir host ! It is well thou hast shown thyself. Bring forth what thou hast in thy house—the best both to eat and drink—if thou hast no wish to see the roof of thy house tumble about thy ears."

"Thou art a bold cock to crow so loudly," said John Barton, "and it is well for thee that thou hast a hundred at thy back. Wert thou alone, thou wouldest sing another tune."

"Hold thy saucy tongue, if thou hast any wish to keep it," returned Goodall, "and do as thou art bid. If thou wouldest know more, learn that the traitor-king has been defeated, and that General Cromwell has sent me here with these honest men, to take possession of Mossville Hall."

"Which may not be so great news to me as thou mayst think," returned the landlord ; "but enter if thou wilt, for indeed now all is thine."

"Spoken like a sensible man," said the officer, dismounting; "I will not forget this."

John Barton turned and entered the inn, and meeting an ostler in the passage, stopped him, and said—

"Jocelyn, hasten thou to the Hall, and acquaint Sir Ingram that the Ironsides are here. Run as if thou hadst wings to thy feet, for not a moment is to be lost."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE HALL.

SIR INGRAM and his few trusty followers rode towards the home of his ancestors, totally unconscious that the Roundheads were so near.

Arriving at the Hall, he gave orders for his retainers to hold themselves in readiness at a moment's notice, and for the drawbridge to be raised.

The grand entrance to the Hall boasted of a portcullis, but the machinery was rusty, and out of repair, and Sir Ingram therefore relied entirely upon the hope that he could hold the Hall by keeping up a heavy fire from the roof and windows, or drive the invaders into the moat, should it come to a hand-to-hand fight.

The men, having seen their horses stabled and well fed, entered the Hall, and prepared to refresh the inner man.

They had, however, scarcely sat down, when a voice from the opposite side of the moat attracted their attention, and one of them rising, went to a window and beheld Jocelyn, the ostler, almost breathless with running, endeavouring to make himself heard.

"What wouldst thou?" cried the soldier, from the window. "Art mad?"

"There be a couple o' hundred o' Ironsides at the 'Crown and Sceptre,'" shouted Jocelyn, "an' they will be here in an hour."

"Thou art sure of this?" inquired the man.

"As I am that I am standing here," replied Jocelyn. "I saw them with my own eyes."

"Enough, good fellow," returned the man. "I shall remember thy face. Away, for thy life is not safe ; and it were a pity thy good service should be rewarded with death."

The man, turning to acquaint his comrades of the news, found that they had heard sufficient to understand the import of Jocelyn's communication, and had all risen from their seats, their swords drawn.

"I will to Sir Ingram," said the man who had spoken to Jocelyn.

He rushed from the room, and ran, sword in hand, up the stairs leading to Sir Ingram's apartments.

He found the knight engaged with Lord Granville, Sir Horace Temple, and two or three other devoted friends and Cavaliers, who rose as the man entered, and whose eyes gleamed and faces flushed as they heard the news.

"Let them come," cried Sir Ingram—"the crop-eared, canting knaves ! While there is an unbroken sword or a charge of powder, it shall never be said that Mossville Hall surrendered to a handful of Noll Cromwell's bloodhounds ! Ring the alarm bell !" he continued, turning to the soldier; "and see that the two falconets on the roof are ready for use ; collect all the arms possible, guard the entrance, and, when I appear, let every man be ready. And thou, Granville," he said, as the soldier bowed and left the apartment, "wilt take a dozen picked men and defend the left wing."

"Sir Ingram," replied the young lord, "as thou knowest, my sword is at the king's service : but pardon me if I ask if this resistance will save the Hall. Consider, that to surrender, although so uncavalier-like, and so much against the wish of us all, may perhaps not only save this grand old mansion, but thy life. Nay, Sir Ingram, do not judge me harshly, for I am ready, and at thy command ; but consider, ere it be too late."

"Is it thou, Granville," cried Sir Ingram, fiercely, "who wouldst have me taint mine honour by surrendering to the base-born churls ? I tell you no ; if I fall, I believe my death will be avenged ; and, God be thanked, my son is safe in Oxford ! If there be one here," he went on, fuming,

" who is not willing to join me, let him depart while there is time, for I swear by my father's name, that while four walls of this house remain they shall find me here ! "

" Forgive me, Sir Ingram," said Granville, " if I have spoken too harshly. God grant that all will be well ! I am ready."

" It is not thou who shouldst ask forgiveness," said Sir Ingram ; " it is I who spoke harshly. But come, the buff-coated dogs will not wait for us. Let us away, see to the ammunition, and station our forces."

Ready, with their pikes and pieces, stood the men, waiting for orders from Sir Ingram.

They were holding a conversation as to the probability of success.

" I fear," said one, " that we shall make a sorry show in this matter."

" Why," roared another, who was sergeant to the party, striking his piece upon the floor, so that the hall rang with the echo, " is there a man so chicken-hearted as to fear to face a crop-eared bastard ? Peace be to the ashes of the builder, say I, for running a moat round the house ! He was a man of sense, and with an eye to the future."

" The moat will avail us but little," said the first speaker.

" Bah ! " returned the sergeant ; " prate not, but look to thy powder. Sir Ingram is not the man to be frightened by a paltry troop of horse. At any rate, we shall have the pleasure of peppering a few of them."

Sir Ingram here appeared, and, in a quiet tone, made a short speech, appealing to his trusty followers, which was received with tremendous cheers, and then gave out the necessary orders, and divided the men, about sixty in number, into four portions.

" I will guard the entrance," he said ; " I should be in the front—aye, and strike the blow at the first man who crosses the threshold."

The last words had scarcely escaped Sir Ingram's lips, when the sound of hoofs was heard, and presently the troop of Ironsides appeared, their swords jangling, and their armour glistening in the sun.

"Who is that at their head?" asked Sir Ingram, of Sir Horace Temple; "I seem to know the face."

"By St. George," cried Sir Horace, "it is Noll's favourite cut-throat, a fellow who is known among his companions as Worthy Goodall! I know the villain, and long to cross swords with him. See, the trumpeter is about to summon us to surrender."

The loud, brazen summons which followed these words, after echoing through the hall and vaulted passages of the old mansion, startled the cattle that were browsing in the meadows, and then died suddenly away in the adjacent forest.

Sir Ingram stepped to the front and demanded their business, to which Goodall replied that as he, Sir Ingram, was a friend of the king, and consequently a traitor to the cause of the people, it had pleased General Cromwell to order him to surrender the Hall to make room for a better and fitter person, by name Jabez Carter, to govern the estate, and receive such rents and benefits from it as might be found belonging and accruing to the same.

The answer from the Cavalier party was a shower of bullets, and two Ironsides bit the dust.

This was quite sufficient answer for the Roundhead officer, and the next instant the muskets of the Ironsides rained their contents upon the outer walls of Mossville Hall; but, with its drawbridge up, its inmates were, comparatively speaking, safe.

This Goodall knew, yet dared not order his men to cross the moat, as he felt certain they would be repulsed with great loss; but night was coming on, and he might find some weakly-guarded spot, and force an entrance.

The sun went down, and the shades of evening, mingled with the smoke of discharged powder, settled down upon the old mansion. Darker and darker, until the building disappeared altogether, save when a flash from one of the guns lit up the air for an instant.

Now came the time when the utmost vigilance was needed on the part of the little party of Royalists. Out-numbered three to one, they were fully aware they stood no chance in

a hand-to-hand conflict, but keeping the enemy on the other side of the moat, all would be well.

But how was this to be done? Sir Ingram was thinking the matter over, when suddenly a yell of terror and rage came from his men, and to his consternation he beheld the drawbridge give way, and fall crashing to the other side of the moat.

The Ironsides who had accomplished this feat had waded the moat, and creeping silently up the bank, loosened the chains—with what result we know.

Concealment was now useless, and they rushed into the entrance, to be met by a dozen pikes and swords, but in a second their comrades were at their backs, and now the hand-to-hand fight began.

The Royalist party fought bravely, and for more than an hour held their ground; but at last the tide turned, they fell back inch by inch, disputing the ground as they retreated; but when Sir Ingram fell, the remaining few turned and fled.

* * * * *

That night the troop of Ironsides made merry in Mossville Hall. Jabez Carter was master, and the good old knight, Sir Ingram Halliday, lay on the floor of the chamber of the room in which he had first seen light, a corpse; a stream of blood trickling slowly from a gash in his side, oozing from the wound, and streaming upon the carpet, as if attempting to write the murderer's name.

CHAPTER III.

THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER.

IT is evening; the sky obscured by sullen, angry clouds, which hide the glory of the setting sun.

The day had been hot; a day to turn the grass to tinder, and to tinge the green corn.

All is still. No longer is the rumbling of wheels heard, nor the voices of labourers returning from their work.

All is silent. There is an unnatural hush in the air ; the birds have ceased to twitter, and the very flowers hang their heads, as if in dread expectancy of the coming night.

To the practised eye, a storm is brewing ; and as the hours pass, the heat becomes more oppressive, and black patches of jagged cloud appear on the horizon—advance-guards to a terrible army behind.

Night is coming on apace, and with the darkness the distant rumbling of thunder.

Then broad sheets of flame shoot up from behind the hills, a few drops of rain, increasing to a deluge, and the storm has burst over Mossville.

At the time when the thunder seemed to rend the very air, and jagged streaks of lightning threatened destruction on all sides, the dusty roads transformed to rivers, two men were straggling into the village.

They were both young, handsome fellows ; and although they were clad in the hideous garb of the period, and that very scantily, they had a superior deportment, which nothing could disguise.

“By my sword,” said one, shaking the water from his hat, “this is the first time I ever verified the fact of rain in bucketsful. I am as wet and cold as a leech in a horse-pond. What say you, Martin ? Was it ever your luck to be out in such a scene ?”

“I know not, nor care,” replied the other, “so that we reach honest John Barton’s to-night, for there we are certain of a hearty welcome, a change of clothes, and a good meal.”

“Pray Heaven you are right, Martin !” returned the first speaker. “But what if this John Barton is dead—hung for being a Royalist, or kicked out of his own house ?”

“I fear not, Temple,” returned the young man addressed as Martin. “If honest John is alive, we shall find him among his wine-measures. See, there is the house, in the street, and there the old sign.”

“Yes,” returned Temple, as a flash of lightning made everything as plain as day ; “and a flattering portrait of that arch-villain, Cromwell, painted upon it.”

“Hush, Temple !” returned Martin ; “the very hedge-

rows have ears nowadays, and every ear of wheat is gifted with the sense of hearing."

"I care not," returned Temple. "May the thunder bear my curse to the villain's ears!"

"Tut, Harry!" said Martin; "this is folly—madness!"

"Neither so foolish nor so mad as your visit to this place," replied Harry Temple. "But I am with you for ever. We have been hunted together, starved together, fought together, and, as I pray for the restoration of King Charles, we'll die together."

This brought them to the "Lord Protector," in days gone by the "Crown and Sceptre."

A light gleamed from within, and Harry Temple, peering into the room, beheld two or three figures, garbed in the strictest Puritan style, seated round a table.

"My worst fears are confirmed," he said, approaching Martin, who was endeavouring to relieve his heavy boots of as much mud as possible. "Look in there. Your honest friend, from your description of him, never courted such company as that."

"Poor John!" said Martin, as he returned from the window; "I wonder what his fate has been. But, friends or foes, we must rest; another night in the open air would cure all earthly ills."

"Lead on," returned Harry Temple; "I am with you A draught of sack, and I care not what follows."

"House, there! house!" shouted Martin, tapping the door smartly with the hilt of his sword. "What ho, there! house!"

There was a shuffling of feet in a passage, and the door was partly opened.

"What would you?" asked somebody in a twanging tone of voice. "The hour is late, and no more wine will be served."

"We are a pair of travellers, drenched to the skin," said Temple; "with light purses, but enough to reward you if you can but give us something to eat and drink, and a bed of clean straw."

"Then come in, in God's name!" said the man, his voice

altering wonderfully. "This is not a night for a dog to be abroad in, much more a human being."

Martin rushed forward and whispered something in his ear, catching the innkeeper's hand. "Nay, speak not aloud," he went on. "Temple, watch yonder door, and see that no one is listening."

John Barton—for the same John Barton it was—could do nothing but stare at Martin in a stupefied manner.

"Aye, John," he continued, "you may look astonished, but it is *he* that stands before you; but call me not so, call me Martin, but beware of mentioning my name, for if I am found, certain death will be the consequence."

"Hold up thy head," said John. "Yes, thou art indeed *he*, and, by my soul, thou art welcome here to-night!"

So saying, John Barton secured the door, and led the way upstairs.

"By my sword!" said Harry Temple, flinging himself into a chair, "but this is a just reward for all we have suffered! A draught of sack, good host, and pray ye send up the list of the kitchen, and gadzooks! make the utmost speed, for my stomach is complaining most woefully."

"The rain, I fear, has washed my appetite away," said Martin, smiling; "but a good night's rest will make me as fresh as a daisy; but zounds! I know not why I should suffer this sodden Roundhead garment to cling about me."

In a twinkling, by some mysterious means, the cloak, doublet, hose, and even shoes of the stranger, were strewn upon the floor, and the next instant a handsome young fellow, clad as a Cavalier, stood before the astonished John Barton.

He wore a doublet of crimson satin, pinked and slashed with white tiffany, breeches of the same, silk stockings, and a most dainty pair of pumps, upon which glittered diamond buckles.

His companion, Harry Temple, also cast off the puritanical garment, and appeared dressed in a similar style, but of a more rakish cut.

"Aye, good master," said John, turning to Martin, "thou

art indeed like thy father. Times are changed, and the people groan under the burden they bear."

"Patience, John, patience," replied Martin. "All will be well. Every account we have from London is better than the last, and a general rising is expected. But, honest John, I will speak with thee to-morrow, and inform thee of the object of my visit here."

"I will be gone," said Barton, "and both of thee shall eat and drink your fill, and welcome, for the sight of thy face is like seeing the sun after a storm."

John hastened below to give the necessary orders in the kitchen, and, when on the staircase, was startled by a loud knocking at the door.

"What now!" John growled, and then aloud cried—
"Who is there?"

"Come, master," exclaimed a shrill voice, "dost thou not know my knock? Let me in, I pray thee."

"Thou imp of darkness," cried the landlord, in return, "this house shall be no shelter for thee to-night. Thou hast played the truant all day, and it shall cost thee thy bed."

"Tush, master," returned the shrill voice, "if thou hast the sense I have always given thee credit for, thou wilt open the door without delay."

"Why, thou devil's own?" cried Barton.

"Because I bring thee news!" replied the voice. "Quick, the rain falls fast, an' if thou makest me pass a night under a hayrick, the tortures of the Star Chamber should not make me utter a word."

Mine host, grumbling audibly, shot back the massive bolts, and dragged in the owner of the shrill voice.

It was a boy roughly clad in a tunic of rabbit-skins, and hose to match. He wore no covering on his head, but a mass of light hair did ample service.

"Now, thou imp of mischief," said John, holding him at arm's length, "what hast thou to say to save thy hide a tanning?"

"Hands off, master," returned the boy, shaking himself free. "I can give a good account of myself; but first let me tell thee I am not alone."

As he spoke a young fellow strode into the passage and saluted Barton. He was a handsome, well-made young man—short, curly black hair, and a pair of eyes of the same colour, which twinkled and glistened mischievously. He was attired in a style between that of the Roundhead and Cavalier ; heavy boots of calf-skin, a tunic of black cloth, girded at the waist with a belt of leather, and his head was partly covered with a rakish little cap, which was worn over the right ear.

"Good Morrow, master," said the stranger. "I would rest here to-night, if thou hast accommodation."

"There is room enough," returned John Barton, eyeing the stranger from head to foot, "but—"

"No 'buts,' good host. I ask not for much—a little bread, meat, and a draught of beer. I am no loitering lozel, who wish to eat and drink, and pay thee with spiritual coin, such as singing a hymn, or an extempore sermon. Besides, I have news for thee."

He whispered a few words in Barton's ear, whose face lost a portion of its vinegar, and smiled upon the stranger.

"Good!" said John. "Thou shalt want for nothing; but these tidings have come too late. He is here now, resting under this very roof."

"Thank God!" said the stranger, fervently. "Tell him that Hugh Walbrook is here, whole in skin, sound in bone."

CHAPTER IV

A NARROW ESCAPE.

THE three Cavaliers were up betimes the next morning, and Temple and Walbrook wended their way towards Mossville House, with the intention of seeing either Carter or his steward, Worthy Goodall.

"What thinkest thou?" said Temple; "dost think we shall be detected?"

"I fear but little," replied Walbrook; "he will not suspect us, especially as we have the introduction of that pious

Puritan, John Barton. If we succeed in gaining work on the estate, our end will be gained."

"Hush!" whispered Temple, "I hear footsteps."

It was Worthy Goodall walking slowly up the avenue.

He stopped and gazed at the two young friends, and, beckoning them to approach, said—

"How now, you fellows; what do ye here? I see ye are none of Mossville."

"Thou art right, good master," said Temple; "we have travelled far in search of work. Last night the host of the 'Lord Protector' gave us a bed of straw, and bade us go to the Hall in the morning, and see an honourable gentleman, by name Worthy Goodall, who he believed required men."

"Mine host is a good Samaritan," returned Goodall; "he giveth to the hungry, and shelters the poor. What canst thou do? Dost understand anything of horses?"

Temple and Walbrook replied that they had been accustomed to them all their lives, an averment which was literally true, though not exactly as it was understood by their interrogator, who proceeded to state that he had been seeking an assistant in the stable, and that he required a messenger, and chose Walbrook to act in that capacity.

"To-morrow at sunrise thy duties will commence," said Goodall, turning on his heel. "Fail not, or it were better thou hadst never shown thyselfs."

Elated with the success of their mission, Temple and Walbrook hastened back to the "Lord Protector," where they found Martin and Barton in close conversation.

"And I, too, am engaged," said Martin, after his friends had finished speaking of their success. "Farmer Hall—see, there is the house, nestling amid the trees on yon hill—has taken me on as a sort of odd man."

"I thought it well for thy sake," said John, "to advise you to apply anywhere but at the Hall. I——"

"You thought I was not to be trusted, and, in a hot moment of temper, might ruin all," Martin broke in. "Well, perhaps you are right; but let me recount a few of my duties—looking after two horses, feeding the pigs,

tending the cows, keeping the garden in order, cleaning shoes, running errands, and doing odd jobs."

"Verily the labourer is worthy of his hire," said Temple.

"The very words my generous master used," returned Martin, "adding, 'You will have little or nothing to do, yet you shall have good victuals, aye, verily, as much as you can eat.'

"Come, that is consoling, at any rate," said Hugh Walbrook, breaking into a rich tone of voice—

"He that is a Cavalier
Need not repine,
Though his substance grows so very low
That he can't drink wine.
So let us sing—
Long life to the king,
And confusion to his enemies."

"Hush ! man," cried Martin. "Hast thou no more discretion ? The bird that sings before the fowler gets paid for his piping with shot."

"Aye," cried Walbrook, "and the bough that flutters in every wind shakes its fruit to the ground. What care I ? my tongue is like my sword—too free at times ; but be not angry if I have crowed too loud."

"Thy tongue must not wag so freely, Walbrook," said Temple, "or we shall be fitted with hempen collars, and learn to dance on nothing."

"Cease this idle talk, gentlemen," said Barton, "for now-a-days I suspect the very walls of listening. Here is health to—"

"Cromwell, Lord Protector of England !" cried Walbrook, bringing his fist down heavily on the table, "and may his enemies be swept from the earth !"

Had an earthquake opened beneath their feet, the party could not have been struck with a more sudden consternation and amazement.

Martin's hand was on his sword, and he was preparing to spring to his feet, when a voice from the door arrested him.

"Repeat the toast, good host ; it does one good to hear it."

The speaker was no other than Jabez Carter, the present occupant of the Hall.

He was dressed in precisely the same style as when he first rode into Mossville, his hair cropped closer than ever, and his face greasier in appearance.

"These young men are making merry," said John, apologetically, "they arrived here last evening, having tramped many miles in search of work, and meeting with success here, are making holiday."

"Worse might be done," returned Carter; "but it is not meet that young men should be so boisterous. Which of these is he that my worthy steward engaged as messenger?"

Hugh Walbrook rose, and doffed his cap, implying that he was the favoured individual.

"Be at the eastern entrance at sunrise," said Carter, "for thou hast a long ride before thee to-morrow. Dost know the country well?"

"Not very well, sir," replied Walbrook, "but trust me I will do thy errand."

"Enough," rejoined Carter; "and if I find thee faithful in all things, thou shalt have no reason to complain of thy master. Remember, to-morrow at sunrise."

Jabez Carter strode from the room, and John Barton and the three disguised Cavaliers breathed more freely.

"By my sword, a narrow escape!" said Temple, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "Dost think he heard more?"

"Nay," returned John; "an' it is lucky for us all that he did not."

CHAPTER V

IN DURANCE VILE.

THE sun was shining brightly through the trees, and the birds sang merrily, as Hugh Walbrook rode through the street of Mossville. The people stood at their doors enjoying the fine morning, and gazed after him as he passed slowly along, smiling and saying a civil word to all.

"Were I not mounted on so sorry a jade," he muttered,

"I might think myself once more on my way to join the king. Ten miles on this hack ; surely I shall need a week's rest after such a journey. Let me see. Who is this packet for ? Ah ! Lovegrace Goodenough, the gentleman invited to expound at the Hall next week."

The questionable specimen of horseflesh upon which Hugh was mounted here broke into a canter, as if, overhearing its rider's remarks, it was determined to astonish him.

All journeys must come to an end, and so did Hugh's, who, having delivered the packet, and received another closely sealed, turned the horse's head, and made the best of his way back to Mossville.

It was late in the evening when he arrived, and having seen the packet in Carter's own hands, walked slowly towards the "Crown and Sceptre," where he found Harry Temple and Martin outside, enjoying the cool air.

"We thought you had lost the way," said Martin, as Hugh came up. "Lend me thine ear a moment, I have good news."

Hugh Walbrook stooped in obedience to the request ; an instant after, his face lit up with smiles, and casting his cap high in the air, he gave vent to a shout of delight.

"Steady ! steady !" said Martin, gravely. "Remember the narrow escape of last night."

"To whom are we indebted for this ?" asked Hugh, picking up his cap, and seating himself beside Martin.

"To that strange boy clad in rabbit-skins ;" returned Martin; "he knows every inch of the Hall, and every secret passage. Nothing must be done hastily ; let us be cautious, and success is certain."

"The sooner the better," said Harry Temple ; "my conscience cries loudly against my sword rusting in its sheath. Would that we had an opportunity of crossing blades with some of these crop-eared knaves ! yet 'twould not be worth while risking a neck-stretching, for the sake of a carrion carcass."

"All in good time," said Martin, "all in good time. Look at yon church. See how its beauty has been destroyed. Look at its defaced carving. Walk through the graveyard,

and you will tread even now on glass, dashed out by the
meatless pikes of sacrilegious, heartless villains."

"Thou art a fair youth to preach a sermon," exclaimed Walbrook. "Who should be reminded of indiscretion? Come, I am weary with riding, and I am sure that both of you must be tired."

The friends then parted for the night, thankful that the morrow was Sunday.

The next morning the three Cavaliers were up with the sun, and, under John's advice, attended the church to hear Lovegrace Goodenough.

Martin's face flushed as he saw the mutilated state of the fine old edifice. Not a stained window remained, the screens of tapestry were torn, the sculptured oaken work defaced, and the effigies of the tombs smashed, their remains still littering the church.

The eyes might wander in vain for the laced cloaks, slashed boots, and tall plumes of the Cavaliers.

All was changed, and yet it was an impressive sight to witness the rural congregation converging together from the surrounding country, some on foot, some on huge cart-horses, all attired in the strict Puritanical style, and, without exception, wearing long swords or rapiers.

These men sat in the church, their arms folded, and their slouched hats pulled over their eyes. Two or three dogs were playing in the aisle, and a few bumpkins in the gallery ate apples, and laughed and talked as though they were waiting for some amusing exhibition.

Jabez Carter arrived and took his seat in the pew that had, in days gone by, been occupied by Sir Ingram Halliday; and soon after, Lovegrace Goodenough's footsteps were heard, and the service commenced.

Lovegrace Goodenough was a violent speaker, he flung his arms about, worked himself into a heat in denouncing the exiled king and his supporters.

"Was not," he said, "his father a traitor to his country, and was not his army filled with the dirt of the land?"

"No! you ragamuffin cushion-cuffer," bellowed Walbrook,

unable to repress his passion, and throwing his cap at the preacher.

A fiery indignation succeeded. A dozen Roundheads sprang to their feet, and, hastily drawing their swords, rushed forward to seize Hugh, amid the confused cries of "Down with the blasphemer!" "Strike him with the sword!" "Down with the Philistine!"

It would have gone hard with Walbrook had not Jabez Carter called out in a powerful voice, "Harm him not—touch not a hair of his head—he is delivered into our hands. Peradventure he is an enemy to the Protector. Let him be bound and led away, and to-morrow I will investigate the matter.

Stubborn and stout-hearted as Hugh Walbrook was, he could not avoid feeling stung with bitter vexation at this scrape, into which he had been led by a few hasty words. He gave Martin one look, as if to say, "Assist them, or you may perhaps be suspected."

Both Martin and Temple understood it, and when cords were brought they made themselves as busy as the rest, and formed part of the escort to the lock-up.

Hugh was thrown into a damp, dismal cell, in the corner of which was some rotten straw.

Dragging himself on to this, the prisoner lay down, and tried to sleep, but in vain.

The pain of his fetters caused him much annoyance, and, as the day wore on, his sufferings became more acute.

Then his thoughts wandered back to the days when, mounted on a charger, he had fought in the king's regiment—their perils, victories, defeats, hardships, and the king's personal bravery.

In the midst of one of these reveries he heard a key rattle in the lock of the door, which was presently opened, and a man entered, bearing some refreshment, in the shape of bread and water.

"Hark ye!" cried Hugh, as the man placed the water on the ground; "do, prithee, be a good fellow for once in thy life, and loosen these cords a bit; don't you see they are cutting my flesh?"

"I have no wish to be hanged in thy stead," said the man ; "thou must remain as thou art till the morning."

"If I do," groaned Hugh, "I shall require no trial. Twist them as much as you like, but, zooks ! you crop-eared—I mean good fellow—what need to torment me thus ?"

"Verily," returned the man, "thy flesh is indeed swelling, and thou shalt share in the tender mercies of the elect."

"Thanks, friend," said Hugh, breathing more freely when the cords were loosened ; "if I escape the halter I will not forget thee. Tell me, friend, where I shall be sent to on the morrow."

"Perchance to London," said the man ; "but I must not talk."

Hugh turned on his side, and fell into a deep sleep.

Evening was deepening into night when he awoke, refreshed in body, but still in very low spirits.

Again did he sit communing with his sad thoughts, and counting the hours struck by the clock of Mossville Church, till the hour of midnight slowly and heavily dragged on.

The bell had scarcely ceased to vibrate when he heard a noise above his head, and, raising his eyes, he perceived the figure of a man filing away the rusty bars.

The man stopped every now and then, as if to speak with some one below.

Another instant, the window casement was softly opened, and, in less time than it takes to write it, Hugh was with his friends in the road.

"Who goes there ?"

The voice ran clear and distinct in the midnight air, and the next instant the burly form of the guard confronted the rescued prisoner and his two companions.

"Friends," replied Martin. "Servants of the squire, and staunch supporters of the Lord Protector."

"I must see your faces," said the man. "Honest people are not often out this time of the night."

"Stand, and let us pass," said Temple, angrily ; "dost think we are thieves, or night prowlers ?"

"Enough of this parley," said the guard. "Not a man shall pass until he can give a good account of himself."

The man lowered his pike in a line with Martin's breast; but it was dashed aside by Temple's sword, and Martin, springing forward, threw the inquisitive guard heavily.

"What ho!" he cried. "What ho, there! Help! Murder! Thieves!"

"Cease thy noise," exclaimed Martin, tightening his grasp on the man's throat, "if thou hast a wish to live."

The man struggled to release himself, but his struggles were futile.

"Lend me thy sash," cried Martin to Hugh. "Quick! for if I mistake not, I hear footsteps approaching."

Before Hugh could comply, several lights flashed from the road, and the voices of several of the guards inquired the reason of the uproar.

"Help!" gasped the man in Martin's grasp. "Help! or I shall be strangled."

There was a trampling of feet, and a dozen armed men faced our heroes.

Martin gave the fallen guard a parting grip, and springing to his feet, drew his sword, which he had concealed under the long cloak he wore.

Harry Temple was already on the alert, and dodging about for the first candidate for cold steel, and Hugh Walbrook had possessed himself of the guard's pike, and stood waiting for the assault.

"Hallo, you ragamuffins!" cried a deep voice, belonging evidently to the sergeant of the party. "What is the meaning of this? Are decent people to be aroused from their beds by three drunken lozels? What! drawn steel too? At them, men, and secure them, dead or alive!"

"Sooner said than done," cried Martin, passing his sword through the right arm of the foremost, while Hugh drove another back at the point of the pike.

"Yield!" cried the sergeant, "or we will mow ye down like grass!"

The Cavaliers did not reply, but, turning, fled into the wood which led to the Hall.

The night was dark, and they soon left the Ironsides far behind.

"Bear to the left," Martin cried; "Sprite is somewhere about."

A low whistle followed this remark, and Sprite, the boy introduced in the opening of our story, leapt from behind a clump of bushes, and beckoned the fugitives to follow him.

"Quick, sirs," he said; "I know all; in an hour the wood will be surrounded, and then all is lost."

The party hastened on, and soon the Hall appeared in sight.

Lights were gleaming from one or two of the upper windows, the rest was in darkness.

"All's well at present," said Sprite. "Keep well in the shadow of the trees, for the watchman has sharp eyes."

They stopped on the banks of the moat, and Sprite, after a short search, dragged aside a bush, and falling on his knees, began removing the earth with his hands, the Cavaliers keeping guard.

Sprite did not keep them waiting long, but called them to assist him in raising a trap-door, to which was attached an iron ring, rusty with age.

The woodwork of the trap-door was old and decayed, and creaked as Martin attempted to raise it.

Temple came to his assistance, and it presently gave way, and disclosed a flight of steps leading to a passage under the moat.

"Good!" said Sprite, and then, handing Martin a small lantern, said, "Take this, and God speed ye! I will make all right above here, and meet ye in ten minutes at the top of the flight of steps beyond the moat."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE.

JABEZ CARTER sat in his private room, reading and sorting some papers which lay before him.

His steward, Worthy Goodall, sat at the other end of the room gazing from the window into the darkness.

"How many years," said Jabez Carter, suddenly, "have I been here?"

Goodall started, for it was the first time his master had ever referred to the day when Sir Ingram fell.

"Thirteen, sir," he replied, "and may the Hall see your master for many years to come!"

Carter smiled, and went on for a few minutes reading his papers.

"Sir Ingram had a son, had he not?" he asked. "Hast heard what has become of him?"

"Nay, sir, I know not," returned Goodall; "the boy was as arch a traitor as his father. The last I heard of him was at the battle of Worcester, where he was fighting in the king's own party. He may have died there for what I know to the contrary."

"I would that your assertion could be confirmed," said Carter. "I would give a round sum to know that he was dead. I sometimes fear his return."

"Fear not," laughed Goodall: "young Halliday is too cunning a fox to come here. He knows the price put on his head, an' I am not mistaken, he has seen the coast of France long ere this."

"Thou mayst be right, but I have heard he was a brave and daring youth."

"Such I believe is true," replied Goodall; "a devil-may-care sort of fellow, every inch a Cavalier, and like his arch-traitor of a father, he——"

"Liar! Sir Ingram was no traitor."

Jabez Carter sprang to his feet, overturning the inkstand,

and scattering the papers about the floor, and gazed in speechless terror on his wonder-stricken steward.

"Didst hear that?" he gasped, at last. "Didst hear that voice?"

"Verily," cried Goodall, whose armour jingled with the shaking of his frame. "Aye, and surely the spirit of darkness abideth here."

"Sir Ingram was no traitor," repeated the voice, slow'y.

The sound now seemed to proceed from the side of the room at which Goodall stood, causing that brave soldier to fall back hastily, upsetting a couple of chairs in his flight.

"Gadzooks!" he cried, the sword visibly trembling in his hand, "we are beset with demons. Come, good master, let us hasten away."

A peal of mocking laughter resounded through the apartment.

Goodall and his master delayed to hear no more, but hastened below.

The news ran like wildfire through the house—the guard was roused, and, bearing torches, proceeded to the room in which the sounds had been heard. All was quiet.

They examined the furniture, stabbed the curtains and tapestry through and thro'gh, and tested the walls; but their efforts to discover any hing like a hiding-place were futile.

"Gadzooks!" said one of the searchers, "but this is strange. Certes, there is nothing here; but mortal or devil, if he will but show himself, I will give him a chance of crossing steel."

As these words were uttered, a sound like thunder rang through the apartment, and the searchers falling back, fled as fast as their trembling limbs could carry them.

It may be imagined that Mossville Hall was that night a scene of commotion.

The guaid was doubled, and every entrance closely watched to prevent the escape of the offenders.

Jabez Carter did not retire until a late hour, and when he did, a guard of armed men escorted him, and searched the apartment in which he was to sleep.

The Roundhead was at heart a coward, and, as the door closed and left him standing in the middle of the gloomy chamber, he would fain have called the men back.

But soon their heavy tread, as they kept guard below, echoed through the building, and, somewhat re-assured, he went to bed, leaving a light to burn in the room.

At first he tried to sleep in vain, and lay for some time looking round the apartment, a vague sensation of dread creeping upon him, which he could not shake off.

The oaken panels were ornamented with portraits of the former occupants of the Hall, some indistinct with age, others standing boldly forward defying time.

There was one of a youth with one hand on the hilt of his sword, and caressing a greyhound, which lay at his feet, with the other.

This attracted Carter's attention more than any other, and several times as he turned over in the futile attempt to sleep, he muttered—

“I have seen that face before—but where?”

The clock struck the hour of one, and the watches announced the hour and pronounced that all was well.

This had a soothing effect upon Carter, and he soon fell asleep.

An hour could not have elapsed when he awoke with a start.

The light had gone out and the room was dark, pitch dark.

What had roused him so suddenly he could not tell—perhaps a dream.

And he lay for some seconds endeavouring to remember if such were the case.

He listened for the tread of the sentinels, but all was still.

The men were resting at their posts, or gathered together in conversation.

The vague sensation of loneliness and horror came back.

He trembled in every limb, and beads of cold perspiration burst out on his forehead.

He would have given half his estate to have been at that moment with the men on guard.

All was still, but the inexplicable dread increased every instant.

Soon other thoughts flashed through his brain.

What if someone were really secreted in the room, after all—had extinguished the light, and was waiting an opportunity to assassinate him !

What if, at the moment he awoke so suddenly, the dagger was at his heart !

He was aroused from this horrible reverie by a sound seemingly above his head.

It was a slight tapping sound, but it ceased soon, and all again was still.

Jabez Carter had not time to give his serious attention to this, for, to his unspeakable horror, he heard somebody or something moving around the bed in which he lay.

It was not like a footstep, but a smothered sound, as if something heavy were being dragged along the floor.

The curtains of the bed were slowly drawn, causing the hair of its occupant to stand on end.

He would have screamed aloud, but his tongue refused its office.

He could do nothing but lie helpless and terror-bound, and gaze into the darkness.

The darkness was soon relieved by a pale blue light, which floated through the apartment like a mist.

At one time it would illumine one side, leaving the other a pitchy black ; at another, it would fall upon the bed, and then shift to the portrait of the youth and greyhound, there to burn steadily for a time, and then to move restlessly round the apartment.

Suddenly it fell, a bright stream, upon the centre of the room, opposite the drawn curtains of the bed, and the next instant a form appeared in its midst.

The terror-stricken Jabez Carter recognized it at once.

It was that of the late Sir Ingram Halliday !

The form was dressed in Cavalier style ; one hand grasped a drawn sword, while the other pointed at the occupant of the bed.

The face was pale, stern in expression, and an unearthly light shone from the eyes.

"Who art thou?" Jabez gasped at last. "If thou art man, speak thy will; if——"

"Jabez Carter! usurper, villain, and coward!" replied the figure, slowly, "what need to ask who is before thee? Hast thou forgotten the night when I fell?—hast thou no memory of how my brave followers were butchered, and how my poor body was spurned as it lay upon the floor of this very room?"

"Mercy!" cried the quaking Roundhead—"mercy! As I live, I knew it not. I took no part in the action."

"Thou hadst never the courage to cross steel with a true follower of the king," returned the figure. "Listen! You have put a price on my son's head; your bloodhound hirelings are on the track, but let them turn from it; let them and you beware of touching one hair of his head!"

The Roundhead did not reply, but kept his eyes fixed upon the figure, his ears drinking in every word.

"He is not dead," the figure continued; "but he is safe from thee and thine. Farewell, and ponder well on what I have said."

The figure and light disappeared, and Jabez Carter, with a prolonged cry of horror, fell into a swoon.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

As may be imagined, the mysterious sounds and appearance of the apparition to Jabez Carter created no little sensation, and another search was instituted, but nothing could be found to create suspicion.

Hugh Walbrook and Harry Temple worked hard, and received the praise of the steward.

They heard of the mysterious occurrences with astonish-

ment, and, like the other servants and labourers, made the best of their way out of the wood before the darkness set in.

One dark and gusty night, soon after the occurrence mentioned in our last chapter, a cart over which was thrown a black cloth, and drawn by a dark-coloured horse, stood in the shade of the trees near Mossville Hall.

It was attended by two men, whose slouched hats, pulled down, completely covered their faces.

They carried drawn swords, and it was evident they were keeping guard, and that the cart contained more than they would care for the prying eyes of Goodall, the steward, to see.

In a few minutes a third appeared, bearing something in his arms which he deposited with as little noise as possible.

"All's safe," he said, with a sigh of relief. "Let us move forward as quickly as possible."

The hoofs of the horse and cart-wheels were bound with hay-bands to muffle the sound, but these precautions were almost unnecessary, for the grass was thick and long.

The man who appeared last drew his sword and went in advance, carrying a dark lantern. A low whistle was soon heard, the horse's head was turned, and the cart proceeded towards the high road.

Every now and then they stopped, and waited until the whistle was heard, and then again went on.

"It is well," said one of the men guarding the cart, "that we chose so dark a night for our expedition."

"Aye," returned the other, "but we must not holla until we are out of the wood, and we are anything but that yet."

"Where do we stop again for the signal?" asked the first.

"At the big oak about a mile from the lodge. But, hist!—what's that?"

"A frightened fawn. See, there it goes. Art nervous, lad?"

"Nay; but I have no wish to have the guard or night, watch upon us, or to risk losing our valuable cargo."

The whistle rang out again, and was immediately repeated.

"The signal is to stop," said the first. "What has happened?"

"Perhaps something very trivial, but rely upon it, if anything serious is the matter, Hugh will soon be with us."

"And here he comes," said Martin, for it was he who had spoken first. "What news?" he asked, as Hugh came dashing up.

"Danger," replied Hugh. "That crop-eared knave Goodall is returning from Uxcombe with his guard, and is at the lodge this very instant."

"What is thy advice?" said Temple. "Certes, we are not safe here."

"Lead the horse to a darker part of the wood," returned Hugh Walbrook, "and climb a tree ourselves."

"Stay!" exclaimed Temple. "By heaven, we are lost! Since the ghost showed itself at the Hall nothing will suit that villain Carter but that the wood shall be scoured. Thou hast heard that such is the fact, Martin?"

"Yes," returned Martin; "but good luck and fortune may aid us yet. Now let us to work. Not a moment is to be thrown away."

The horse was led slowly away and secured to a tree, while the disguised Cavaliers mounted trees at a short distance, and listened for the sound of their enemies' horses. They had not long to wait. Goodall, the steward, and about a dozen armed men came riding slowly down the avenue.

The worthy steward had that day been making merry, and seemed inclined to look upon the ghost affair lightly.

"Some rogue or idiot," he said, "secreted in some sly corner."

"And how, Master Goodall, do you account for the ghost the squire saw?" inquired one of the men.

"Pshaw!" replied Goodall. "His nerves were unstrung by the voice in the room: he went to bed, suffered from nightmare, and there's an end on't."

"What was that?" exclaimed one of the men, reining up his horse. "Didst not hear a sound?"

"Nay," replied Goodall. "But, gadzooks! what is't in the road before us?"

The men followed his glance, and beheld, about fifty yards ahead, something that danced and skipped about the road, now on all-fours, now on its feet, jumping high in the air, turning somersaults, walking on its hands, and a variety of other manœuvres, which not only astonished the party of Roundheads, but puzzled them as to whether the object of these antics was man, beast, ghost, or hobgoblin.

"What can it be?" said one of the men. "Odds-fish, but we are swarmed with demons. I vote that we turn back; who knows but yon imp may be leading us to some trap!"

"Man or devil," said Goodall, "I will have a shot at it."

So saying, he drew a pistol from his belt, and, taking aim, fired.

There was no reply, but when the smoke cleared away, there was the figure, dancing, hopping, and skipping, as lively as ever.

Suddenly it disappeared, and the party rode on for a few minutes undisturbed.

But peace was soon denied them, for a terrific yell ran through the air, and the figure dropped from a branch and fell within a few yards of the horses, and then disappeared with an unearthly scream.

Goodall's horse reared, nearly throwing its rider, and throwing the party, who had taken care to be together, into confusion.

"By my soul!" Goodall muttered, "I scarcely know what to think. Either we are beset by a body of evil spirits, or a plot is brewing by some of those arch villains, the Cavaliers, and these are but tricks to blind us. Forward!" he cried, turning to the men; "we will to the Hall, strengthen our guard, scour the woods, and perchance we may find the hornets' nest."

A yell of derisive laughter followed this, and a shrill voice exclaimed—

"Take care! hornets have stings, and can use them, too."

The men, who were all more or less superstitious, lost no time in obeying their commander's orders, but spurred on, and, in a minute, the whole party were galloping towards the Hall as if for their lives.

We must now return to the three fugitive Cavaliers.

They heard the pistol-shot, the galloping of the horses, and, to their great relief, the sounds die away in the distance.

"Something has alarmed the party," Martin whispered.
"Dost think we can proceed in safety now?"

"Thou mayest do so now," said a voice, seeming to come from the earth. "Good masters, all is well."

It was Sprite, the boy at the inn, who spoke.

"How now?" said Hugh. "Hast thou left thy post?"

"Aye, master," returned Sprite, "an' it were well that I did so; but I will tell thee more anon. But away, or the guard will be buzzing about thy ears; and, see, the moon means treason, and is coming out to lighten them on their way."

The three Cavaliers swung themselves to the ground, and Sprite, taking the horse by the bridle, led the way out of the wood.

They stopped before emerging into the high road, to relieve both horse and wheels of the hay-bands, the black cloth was removed, and the three Cavaliers separated, while Sprite jumped up into the cart, drove boldly down the road, whistling a tune, and wishing a cheery good-night to those he met.

"The Lord Protector" soon appeared in sight, and Sprite, driving round to the back entrance, was met by Barton.

"Safe!" said Sprite, softly. "Look in, master, and feast thy eyes. All as bright as silver, and longing to be at work amongst the Roundheads!"

Barton looked into the cart, and a smile broke over his face as he said—

"The time is not far distant when the people of Mossville will use them."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVALIER'S HAUNT.

THE light of the setting sun streamed through the windows of one of the unoccupied rooms of Mossville Hall.

The furniture had not been removed, and the apartment remained in the same state as when Sir Ingram Haltiday had been master, but everything was smothered with dust, and the walls and ceilings were covered with cobwebs.

At the table, his back to the window, stood Martin.

"Ruined and dilapidated!" he muttered; "the work of five hundred years destroyed in a few years by this sanctimonious, canting, lying scoundrel. Oh! how I have longed to let my rapier taste the villain's blood! But, no; to act rashly would be utter ruin. I must wait, and should the king return, why, then——"

"You would carry out your threat," said another voice.

A panel slid back and disclosed the form of Hugh Walbrook.

"Gadzooks!" he said, as he stepped into the room, "it does my heart good to see you so gaily attired, and reminds me of old times."

"I would they were to come again," said the other, sorrowfully.

"And mark me," returned Hugh, "we shall hear good news shortly. I was in the village some time ago, and, by my soul, the people were talking open treason in the very streets. I was riding behind my worthy master, when a voice cried—'God save King Charles!' Gadzooks! you may be sure that it made me jump round in my saddle, and as for my crope-ared master, he turned as white as the ghost he has sworn he saw, and bade me ride closer, for the people looked at him with anything but pleasant faces."

"Have you seen Barton to-day?" inquired Hugh.

"Aye, that I have," replied Martin; "and, by my soul, it does one good to see the old cock rub his hands, and hear him chuckle. He was at work all last night in his garden,

and he says he has sown seed that will never come up till wanted."

Hugh laughed as he said—

"John speaks the truth. The crop was ready before the seed was sown."

"And now to business," said Martin. "Where is Temple?"

"With Sprite, in the vault," Hugh replied.

"That is well. If possible, we will attempt to run another cargo to-morrow night, but this time more precaution must be taken. *Ma foi!*" he continued, with a laugh, "last night I felt the rope round my neck, and my body dangling from the same branch from which I was swinging my legs."

"A lucky escape," said Hugh, with a laugh. "I think I can see that valiant body of horse flying for their lives. But come, Temple is expecting us. Much has to be done before morning."

"I am yours to command," returned Martin, approaching the wall, and touching a spring. "Lead on, and I will follow."

At Martin's touch a panel of the wall slid noiselessly back, disclosing a long, narrow passage, through which the Cavalier went until stopped by another door.

This was opened in the same manner, and revealed a flight of steps leading to the underground portion of the Hall.

Here Hugh took a dark lantern from his pocket and lighted it, bade his companion, in a whisper, pull off his boots, as he explained they were now passing through the occupied part of the Hall.

Martin and Hugh passed through several of these passages in silence, until they came to an iron door, in the centre of which was a grating.

Here they halted, and Hugh, sounding a whistle, was answered by another, and Sprite presented his face at the grating, and opened the door.

The chamber, or rather vault, into which Sprite admitted our two heroes, was one of rather small dimensions, with a groined roof, upon which were carved fantastic figures.

From floor to ceiling it was piled with arms—swords, rifles, halberds, muskets, and pistols, in profusion.

In this snug little armoury sat Henry Temple, who rose as his friends entered, and greeted them cordially.

"You were gone so long," he said, "that I feared you had fallen into the hands of our enemies, but, Heaven be thanked ! you are safe."

"As a roach," exclaimed Martin, "and as hungry as a hunter. I have fasted twelve hours."

Sprite retired to an inner vault, and shortly appeared with a bottle of wine and part of a cold haunch of venison.

"Marry !" said Martin, with his mouth full, "if this is not a better dinner than ever I ate at court. No man can fight with an empty belly, nor work with a full one ; but as we have to work, and fight to boot, let me not starve. Here, lads, fill up your glasses, and drink his majesty's health."

This was done, and when Martin had finished his meal the three Cavaliers sat down to talk of their future plans, while Sprite dodged about with a bottle to replenish the empty glasses.

"It is lucky," said Temple, "that the crop-eared knaves did not find out this den, or, by my sword ! our visit here would be worth little. Thanks to Sprite, we have arms enough for five hundred men."

"Tell me, Sprite," said Martin, "how you became acquainted with these secret passages. Art sure that thou and we alone know of them ?"

"Surely, master, had the Roundhead, Carter, or any of his men, known of them, they wou'd have been searched, after both he and his steward were frightened out of their senses by a voice."

"The boy is right," said Temple, "and has a head worth all ours put together. But tell us, good Sprite, the history of thy discovery "

"There is little to tell, good masters," Sprite replied. "At one time I used to run errands for the Hall, as well as for Mrs. Barton, and one morning I was standing in the great room, with my back to the wall, and heard a noise

like that of a rat running between the brick-work and the panel. The thought then struck me, that there would be secret passages in so old a building."

"A good thought for us," said Hugh.

"Cease thy prate," exclaimed Temple, "and let the boy get on with his story."

"I passed my hand up and down the panel against which I was standing," Sprite went on, "and, to my astonishment, saw it slide back. At that moment I heard Goodall's step in the passage, and slid it back again."

"Thou didst well," said Hugh. "Help thyself, lad, the wine will freshen thy memory."

"I said nothing about the discovery," the boy went on, "and I determined to explore the secret passage alone, as I had often heard that it was believed that Sir Ingram Halliday had stored up a quantity of arms."

"Amidst which we are now sitting," ejaculated Hugh.

"But which had never been found. Shortly after that I found the trap-door through which you first entered. That is all, good masters. That I kept my counsel, you know."

"And a true-born young Royalist thou wert," cried Harry Temple; "and here is thy health, and I pledge my word that should times alter, the first I shall remember will be Sprite."

"Ere we part," said Martin, "let us arrange when we meet here again. Another expedition should be made as soon as possible. Say, comrades, when shall it be?"

"What say you of to-night?" said Hugh.

"Nay" returned Martin. "It is not safe. The Roundheads are on the alert. Let us give them a day or two's rest, and then to work again. To-night I——"

"Must see the pretty maid that lives on the hill," laughed Temple; "and, by my soul! I envy thee, for a more charming girl never lived. Let us meet here to-morrow night at sundown."

"Dost think it safe for me to venture out?" inquired Hugh. "Marry! but I feel stifled here."

"You will be safe under Barton's roof," returned Martin; "but under no other."

" You may rely upon my discretion ; but the devil himself would not know me now."

He was dressed in a suit of sad-coloured brown, and wore a false beard.

" Come then," said Martin. " But remember the reward if you are caught."

The three Cavaliers, headed by Sprite, who this time bore the lantern, traversed the passages, and in ten minutes were in the shade of the trees of Mossville Wood.

CHAPTER IX.

MARIE SHELFORD.

THE air was fragrant with the perfume of honeysuckle, and the birds made sweet music in the air, as Marie Shelford sat in the rich light of a golden sunset, busy at her spinning-wheel.

The mists from the meadows rose, and yet the rays of the expiring sun lingered amid her nut-brown tresses, as if loth to leave so glorious a treasure.

Marie's fingers were busy with the hemp, but they worked mechanically, as if the brain that should have guided them were otherwise occupied.

The sun disappeared behind the hills, the birds ceased to twitter, and sought their nest : but still she sat, her eyes upon the garden gate, her fingers still engaged on the wheel.

" He will not come," she murmured. " What can have detained him ?"

The words had scarcely passed her lips when a footstep sounded in the road ; her face lighted up, and running to the gate, she met Martin Steynton, who caught her in his arms and imprinted a kiss on her lips.

" Where have you been, truant ? " asked Marie. " I have watched and waited more than two hours."

"I will tell thee anon," Martin replied; "but just answer me one thing—Hast seen Jabez Carter to-day?"

"Nay," Marie returned. "Father was at the Hall, and brought back the news that the squire was unwell, and could not be seen."

"So much the better," said Martin. "Now run away for thy hat, and let us walk in the moonlight."

Another step sounded in the road, and Worthy Goodall presented himself at the gate.

He had evidently been making merry, probably on account of his master's illness; his legs were unsteady, and showed a tendency to go their own way, and leave the body to take care of itself.

He sang and talked by turns, and Martin, who had hidden himself behind some shrubbery, fancied he heard Marie's name mentioned more than once.

"Ghosts?" hiccupped Goodall; "ghosts? nonsense! Gadzooks! I should like to meet one now."

He drew his sword and flourished it in the air.

"I should like to see the ghost," he went on. "that would care to tackle me—or the man who would call himself Royalist, for one is as bad as the other—both devils."

Martin's hand grasped the hilt of his sword, for he saw Marie leave the cottage.

"How now?" cried Goodall, staggering about the path, "here comes that pretty wench of Shelford's. Zooks! a likely lass, and who knows may one day be Mrs. Worthy Goodall?"

"What! my pretty chick," he cried, addressing Marie; "what! going out alone? Nay, nay, I will accompany thee, for thou art a favourite of mine."

"You will please let me pass," returned Marie, angrily; "if you have business with my father, you will find him within."

"A kiss, and thou art free to roam," said Goodall, endeavouring to catch the girl in his arms.

Marie uttered a slight scream, but it had scarcely left her lips when Martin rushed from his hiding-place and seized the steward's throat with a grasp of iron.

"What! The foul fiend!" gasped Goodall. "Take thy hands from my throat, I prithee."

Martin kept his hat well over his eyes, thus preventing the steward from seeing his face.

"Let go thy hold," cried Goodall, again, "or the morning sun shall see thee swinging on the nearest tree."

Martin heeded neither entreaties, threats, or promises, but tightening his grasp, and throwing his weight and strength into one effort, threw Goodall to the ground with a crash.

The fallen Roundhead lay still—he was stunned by the fall.

"So much for such a *mr.*," said Martin, turning the senseless body over with his feet. "Marry! he will not interrupt us again for an hour or two."

"But he will know thee, Martin," said Marie, clinging to his arm; "thou must fly."

"Nay, Marie," returned Martin, "fear not for me. I have been through worse adventures when in the service of our king, and would do more for your sake. Should it be necessary for me to go to Mossville, keep well the secret I have entrusted you with; breathe not a word to your dearest friend, or, by the stars above us, I am a lost man."

"I tremble when I think of thy peril," returned Marie, "and would that you were out of danger, and yet——"

"You would have me near thee," said Martin, "nay, think me not vain. Were it not for you, Mossville Hall would be without a master this night."

"Talk not so," returned Marie, covering her face with her hands; "I cannot bear to hear thee speak thus. For Heaven's sake, shed no blood."

Martin was about to reply, when a party of armed men passed by on the road, in the direction of the "Lord Protector."

"Another pack of Roundhead hounds," muttered Martin; "who now, I wonder, is to make sport for them?"

He was soon to learn.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURE AND ESCAPE.

WHEN Martin left Marie he hastened to John Burton's inn, and there beheld, to his horror, Hugh Walbrook seated on horseback, his hands tied, and his face wearing a woebegone expression.

Soldiers were pouring in and out of the inn, and John had hard work to keep the glasses and horns filled for his hungry customers.

As Martin strolled, gulping down his wrath and sorrow, his eye caught his old companion's. Walbrook struck the horse sharply with his heels, causing the animal to rear and start forward, nearly throwing its helpless rider.

“Ma foi!” said Walbrook, “if thou hast a wish to take me to London without a broken neck, thou hadst best have this beast tended, for should he start again thou mightst, perhaps, be disappointed of seeing me on Tower Hill.”

“Cease thy prate,” said the officer in command, “and joke not; but make the best of the little time left thee. Come hither, fellow,” he cried to Martin; “hold this horse while we rest, and thou shalt be rewarded.”

Martin complied, and holding the bridle in one hand, patted the animal's neck with the other.

There was a great uproar, the men mounting or dismounting, riding hither or thither, to all appearance paying no attention to their prisoner.

“A bad scrape,” said Walbrook, speaking under his breath, “but I do not despair. Should I escape, I shall go to Oxford. Dost hear?”

“Heaven grant it may be so!” returned Martin, turning his face away.

“Come, lad,” Hugh went on, “do not give way, it cuts me to the quick. Better times are at hand. What if my head fall?—it will be in the service of my king, and I can die happy. I am unarmed, thou hast a knife, pass it under the saddle, it may be useful.”

Martin had scarcely time to do this when the trumpet sounded, and the men mounted ready to return. Soon they moved away, and Martin watched the form of Hugh Walbrook until hidden by the darkness.

"Oh ! would that he had never seen Mossville," murmured Martin, sinking down on a settle outside the inn ; "my old schoolfellow, companion in arms, and trusty friend, you have risked life and fame for my sake, and lost all !"

We must now return to the troop of Ironsides and their captive.

They jogged along for several miles, the men smoking, laughing, and talking, and Hugh pondering and weighing his chances of escape.

The prisoner was placed under the guard of two burly fellows, who chatted, and made bets as to the place where their prisoner would suffer.

This conversation did not enliven Hugh, and he bade them desist ; but they only laughed, and jested the more.

Hugh tried the cords with which his hands were bound, and found that he could easily remove them should a chance of escape occur.

One of the men guarding Hugh stopped to light his pipe ; the other rode slowly on alone. The pipe was obstinate, and the tobacco damp, and by the time it was rekindled most of the men were out of sight, and the other guard some two or three hundred yards up the road. Angrily dashing his pipe to the ground at this discovery, he set spurs to his own horse, and seized the bridle of the one upon which Hugh was mounted.

The soldier's horse started forward, stumbled, and fell, throwing its rider violently to the ground. A hope of escape passed through Walbrook's mind like lightning.

He threw himself from the horse, tore the cords from his wrists, and darting into the wood which skirted the road on either side, plunged into the thickest cover he could find.

Not an instant was to be wasted.

This Hugh knew well, as the rest of the party were only a trifling distance ahead, and already heard the cries of the fallen soldier shouting to his companions. The first

expedient that occurred to him was the same which the king had previously adopted when flying from Worcester—to climb a tree.

Hugh had scarcely selected, climbed, and ensconced himself amid the leafy boughs of an oak, when he heard the troopers galloping back, and dashing through the under-wood beneath.

Just as they came to the tree in which the Cavalier was hidden, a cloud passed over the moon, and left the wood in darkness.

"Mistress," Hugh murmured, "I thank thee for hiding thy light. Keep but that nightcap upon thy face, and I would defy Noll and his army to find me."

The men now returned, and, dismounting, commenced beating the brushwood, and now and then calling to each other, sometimes under the very tree in which Hugh was perched, and then proceeded deeper into the wood—to return disappointed.

"By my soul!" Hugh heard one fellow say, "were he not a Cavalier, and an arch-villain to boot, it would be no flattery to call him a brave fellow."

"He comes from a devil-may-care family," said another; "he's a Walbrook—and that's enough. Dost remember his father, how he cut and slashed at Naseby? Gadzooks! but he emptied many a saddle."

"What became of him?" inquired the first speaker.

"He was killed at Worcester," replied the other. "He and his son, who has just given us the slip, were the last to flee. The father fell, but the devil's luck clung to the boy then, as it has done to-night."

"Dost think it likely that we shall camp here to-night?" asked the first.

Hugh's heart beat high, and he held his breath as he listened for the reply.

"Nay," returned the other; "I heard the captain say he considered it useless. The bird cannot easily escape when so many fowlers are about; the country will be well sconred to-morrow."

Hugh breathed freely as he heard this, and sat pondering

on the course he should pursue on the morrow, when the bingle sounded for the troopers to mount, and a few minutes after, Hugh, to his great relief, heard the sound of the horses' hoofs on the high road.

"Now, sweet Sleep," said Hugh, "come to my aid."

Hugh ascended to a forked branch, and pillowing his head on his arm, soon fell fast asleep.

He was awakened early the next morning by the chirping of birds.

As near as he could calculate, it was about three o'clock.

After peering cautiously around, he let himself down gently from the tree, and walked cautiously over the grass, keeping in the thickest parts of the wood, deeming it not unlikely that some of the troopers were patrolling up and down; but the silence remaining unbroken, he ventured into the more open spaces of the wood, and reached its extremity without interruption.

Here again Hugh paused to listen and ascertain that no one was near before he ventured into the open road, but all was still, and crossing the highway, he struck into the fields beyond.

During the excitement and chase he had neither felt hunger or thirst, but now the pangs of both attacked him.

A spring relieved the latter, but no description of food could he get beyond a few wild berries growing upon the hedgerows.

Plucking these as he went along, he suddenly heard a footstep behind him, and turning, beheld a man dressed as a pedler, with a box in his hand, a pipe in his mouth, and aiding himself with a stout staff, advancing at a rapid pace, threatening soon to overtake him.

"Now who can this be?" muttered Hugh; "but pshaw! I am as weak as a kitten, and as nervous as a wild rabbit. It can be but man to man at the worst."

Hugh, however, was not over-anxious for a companion, and mended his pace, hoping to outstrip the pedler.

But no; the pedler stepped out with so vigorous a stride that Hugh felt it impossible to avoid being overtaken unless

he took to running, which he argued would not only excite suspicion, but would be uncavalierlike, to boot.

Hugh therefore slackened his pace, and humming a tune, and affecting nonchalance, hoped that the tramp would pass him.

But here again Hugh was disappointed, for the pedler went alongside, commenced speaking.

"Hey ! my merry master," he said, "art crowing the sun to rise ! Gadzooks ! I shall be glad when he shows his ruddy face, and warms this poor earth."

"Thou art merry," said Hugh, looking at his companion.

"And why not?" returned the pedler ; "nay, comrade, never look so glum, let us be merry while we can. I know there's an act against may-pole dancing, singing, whistling, and humming ballads, but it's hard the cock may not stretch his throat when he is liable to have his neck twisted to-morrow."

Hugh Walbrook was not a little alarmed at this remark, and preserving silence, slackened his pace again, hoping that his troublesome companion would pass on ; but the pedler lounged along by his side, as if determined not to be shaken off.

"Hark ye," he went on, "I see by thy looks that thou art hungry, what say thee to a snack of ruff-peck and rome-bowse ?"*

"I understand nothing of your pickpocket's cant," said Hugh, losing his temper ; "nor do I want thy company."

"What!" exclaimed the pedler ; "a beggar or labourer—for such thou art by thy dress—and not know what ruff-peck is? Ha ! ha ! Gadzooks ! wert thou a gentleman, it might be different, but beshrew me ! this is indeed spicy. Why, where wert thou born, man ?"

"Now hark ye," exclaimed Hugh, stopping, and facing his companion ; "I have no wish for thy company, nor for thy sauciness, and I warn thee, sir pedler, that if thou pester me again, I will trounce thee within an inch of thy life."

"Spoken like a man," returned the pedler, coolly, "by

* Thieves' slang of that day—"bacon and wine."

my soul ! But, master, the roads were made for me as well as thee. We poor devils of the road have that one privilege left ; we lie at night under hedges, or soundly burrow in a hayrick—nay, it is not seldom, *when hard pushed, we mount a tree and pass the night there !*

Hugh felt that he was changing colour, but to hide his confusion, asked the pedler civilly whither he was travelling.

“ To Oxford,” was the reply, “ if I am not stopped.”

“ Stopped ! ” echoed Hugh ; “ I should imagine that thou hast but little fear of that.”

“ That is where the error lies,” said the pedler : “ every man is suspected nowadays, and no man can make a journey without running the gauntlet through a troop of Ironsides. Why, 'tis only last night a young Cavalier was taken at Mossville, and escaped by a miracle. Poor devil ! he stands but little chance ; he might as well have submitted quietly.”

“ What said the gossips of this Cavalier ? ” inquired Walbrook. “ Who is he ? ”

“ He is called by the Roundheads Hugh the Devil, but his name is Hugh Walbrook, although, I am informed, his nickname is the more appropriate of the two. Thou art, I see, bound for Oxford.”

Starting and colouring at this, Hugh Walbrook determined to rid himself of his companion at all risks, and turning, said—

“ Nay ; the knave of an innkeeper must have misdirected me. I am wandering out of my way ”

To the Cavalier's rage and astonishment, the pedler faced round, declaring that all places were alike to him.”

Hugh felt now that he was driven to a stand, and, putting himself in a menacing posture, roared—

“ S'blood ! — ”

His aggravating companion interrupted him by saying—

“ Stay, friend, there is an act against swearing. Forget not the penalty ! ”

“ Curse the penalty ! ” cried Hugh Walbrook, “ and you too. Stand from my path, or I will put marks upon thy throat that will never leave thee ! ”

“ Forgive me, Hugh Walbrook,” said the pedler to the

astonished Cavalier ; “ I will not trifle with thy feelings any longer. I am Sir John Morton ! ”

Hugh sprang to his feet with a cry of joy, and seized the baronet’s hand.

“ Forgive me,” Sir John went on, speaking now in his natural tone of voice ; “ but I was anxious to know if my disguise was complete.”

“ Gadzooks ! ” said Hugh, smiling. “ Complete ! thy father would not know thee with thy pedler trappings and borrowed slang, but now thou hast spoken in thy hearty voice, thou art a pedler no longer.”

“ Let us march for yonder wood,” said Sir John ; “ I have another suit, that thou must put on, and after that we will have breakfast—then hey for Oxford.”

“ And on the way,” said the now light-hearted Hugh, “ thou shalt tell me why thou art here.”

“ Aye ! ” returned Sir John ; “ and the object of my journey to Oxford.”

Hugh Walbrook having donned the disguise provided by Sir John Morton, ate a hearty breakfast from his companion’s wallet, and pronounced himself ready to proceed.

“ Like yourself,” said Sir John, as they walked along, “ I have been knocked about from pillar to post. I followed the king to the coast, saw him embark in safety, and then returned to Oxford. But there it was too hot for me, and I was compelled to fly.”

“ How long have you worn this disguise ? ” inquired Hugh.

“ Since I left Trevor Hall,” returned Sir John, “ where we held out until we were literally starvug. Lord Trevor, as you know, was killed at Naseby, and Lady Trevor sent to me to take charge of the Hall.

“ I answered to the summons with all speed, collected the arms, and in four days was prepared to meet the invaders.

“ Two troops of horse and one of foot appeared the morning after the preparations of defence were completed, and called upon us to surrender. I went to Lady Trevor, and implored her to fly with her son, but she refused.

"Sir John," she said, "I leave the matter in your hands, but I will not fly from the sacrilegious knaves."

"My lady," I replied, "I am at your command, and I have no doubt but what our men will do their best, but, from what I can learn, it is impossible to hold out for more than ten or twelve days."

"Nor did we so long," pursued Sir John, "for the besiegers brought two field pieces to bear upon us, and in three days the Roundheads were masters of the situation."

"What became of Lady Trevor?" inquired Hugh.

"She managed to escape on the night of the siege," Sir John replied, "and fled with her boy to France."

This conversation brought them to a roadside inn, where for a time we must leave them to rest and refresh, and retrace our footsteps back to Mossville.

When Martin left Marie, she ran back to the garden, and found Worthy Goodall recovering from the effect of his fall.

It was evident that he had no idea who the delinquent was, but when Marie spoke to him his eyes gleamed maliciously.

"So, wench," he said, "you encourage footpads and thieves to throttle thy father's friends. Fear not but he shall hear the truth."

"Thou hast been drinking," returned Marie. "Nay, but thou wert anything but sober when thou camest here. Thou has been dreaming."

"The wench may be right," muttered Goodall, "and yet it could not be a dream. No, no. There's something at the bottom of this that requires sifting, and for the present I shall do well to keep a still tongue. It may be as you say, lass" he said, turning to Marie. "I was in the wine-cellar this evening, and the fumes of the abominable stuff must have affected me. So farewell. Tell thy father I will see him to-morrow evening."

"Your message shall be delivered," said Marie.

Worthy Goodall, turning his back on the cottage, took the highway which led direct to the Hall.

It was a lovely night, the sky with scarcely a cloud, the moon at full, and the myriad of stars twinkling brightly.

The roads were silent, not a sound disturbed the stillness save the tinkling of the sheep-bells or the barking of a distant watch-dog.

As Goodall turned into the avenue, the thought of the mysterious figure he had seen with his men flashed through his brain, and the steward quickened his pace, having no wish to renew the acquaintance of the apparition.

Some parts of the avenue were so overhung with trees that the light was entirely shut out, and it was in one of these that Goodall thought he heard himself called by name.

But attributing it to his fancy, he proceeded, but the next instant a cold perspiration burst from his face, and trembling in every limb, he stood gazing at a figure which had suddenly appeared before him.

It was the form of Sir Ingram Halliday.

The figure paced to and fro with noiseless steps, a misty blue light following in its track, and Goodall beheld to his horror that the figure threw no shadow.

"Merciful powers!" said Goodall, starting back, "it was no faucey of my master."

The figure stopped, and, looking at Goodall, seemed about to speak, but the steward's nerves gave way, and covering his face with his hands, and uttering a stifled groan of horror, he fell to the ground in a swoon.

When he recovered he was in his room at the Hall, and several of the guard and domestics standing round.

He did not speak of the apparition, but pleading illness, retired to rest.

CHAPTER XI.

BLOOD MONEY.

SPIRIT, the boy at the inn, and friend to the disguised Cavaliers, was, perhaps, one of the most remarkable and useful youths with which this earth was ever favoured.

In his wild garb of rabbit skins, his light hair floating

behind, he might be met on some errand twenty times in the day, skimming over the ground as swiftly as the animals with whose skins he was clothed.

Sprite was everywhere at once.

He found time to fetch water for the villagers, knew the names of every herb and wild plant, and not unfrequently gave advice to the sick.

At early morn he was in the fields bird-catching, or improving his simple knowledge of botany, yet, when required at the inn, he was seldom absent.

He was a merry, light-hearted rogue, and universally liked, especially by his master, John Barton, who looked upon the boy as something more than mortal.

"That boy," he would say to a stranger, "has an old head upon a young pair of shoulders. He can do anything—climb, sing, dance, and fence."

John knew little or nothing of Sprite's history.

He had come into the village soon after the battle of Worcester, and, locating himself at the inn, had remained there to that time.

The day after Goodall had seen the apparition, Sprite was absent nearly all day, returning at even-tide, looking very sad and down-hearted.

"How now?" inquired John. "What's the matter, lad? Thy face is as long as a side of bacon!"

"I will speak to thee anon," said Sprite. "But bother me not now. Stay, take this."

Sprite placed a handful of coins on the table.

"What is this?" exclaimed John.

"Blood-money," returned Sprite.

"Who gave it thee—the devil?"

"Guess again, master," said Sprite, "and you can't be wrong."

"Then you have been to the Hall," said Barton, after a pause. "Beware, boy, what thou doest there. Let not a word slip, or all our necks will be fitted with collars of hemp."

"They should tear me to pieces first," returned the boy. "But I have not told you all. Those cursed coins were

given me to watch thee, for Carter suspects thee of harbouring the Cavaliers."

"When didst thou hear this?" asked John.

"Not an hour ago," returned Sprite; "Jabez Carter suspects thee. I am to watch thy actions, and convey the news every morning to the Hall."

"And what was thy reply?"

"What could I say, good master? I promised him obedience, and, gadzooks! I will spin him a yarn long enough to fill the Gazette."

"Dost imagine he has heard anything to create suspicion?" asked John.

"I know not," said Sprite; "nay, I think not, but he is afraid of his life, and wears armour under his doublet. Since the ghost appeared at the Hall, he is a changed man."

"A mysterious affair that," mused John.

"Very," returned Sprite, "an' what is stranger still, Goodall saw it last evening, and was brought in in a swoon."

"Now, boy," said John, "I will trust to thee. There are lives in thy hands; act truly and honestly, and in after times thou wilt have no cause to repent it; but this money is thine."

"I cannot touch it," exclaimed Sprite; "think not, master, that I am to be bought by a few paltry coins. I tell thee that I will go and torment this Carter, that he shall wish he had never beheld me."

"What course do you intend to pursue?" said John.

"Leave that to me," Sprite rejoined; "but, hush! I hear a footstep in the passage."

The sound approached, the door opened slowly, and Carter, pale and haggard, entered the apartment.

"I greet thee, honest John," he said, taking a seat at the table, "and would speak with thee alone."

Sprite took the hint, and disappeared.

John could not think for the life of him what Carter had to say.

"Landlord," said Carter, when they were alone, "the arch-villain who was arrested in thy house last night was

Recommended by thee to my steward. What knew you of him before he arrived at Mossville ? ”

“ Nothing,” said John, freely ; “ he seemed an honest, hearty fellow, but I never saw him before in my life.”

“ These are times when we must be cautious,” said Carter, after a pause.

“ Your excellence is right,” returned John. “ Caution is necessary.”

“ You knew Sir Ingram Halliday,” said Jabez Carter. “ Wouldst know his son ? ”

“ Sir Ingram’s son left Mossville when a boy, and—
and—”

Jabez Carter interrupted the landlord by stamping his foot on the floor ; the door was thrown open, and in an instant the room was filled with armed men.

“ John Barton,” said Carter, “ I arrest you as a traitor.”

Mine host did not reply, nor a muscle in his rubicund face move.

“ Barton,” continued the Roundhead, “ I trusted thee, but thou hast betrayed me. When I first entered Mossville I was vested with the power to drive thee from house and home.”

“ Enough ! ” said John ; “ take me where thou wilt, but poison not my ears with thy cant nor thy deeds of mercy. Just now mention was made of Sir Ingram’s son—mark well what I say—He will return, and every insult to his name, or to that of a true follower of the king, he will avenge—long life to him, say I, and may he return with the king to drive such rats as thee from the land ! ”

During this speech Carter’s face had changed from white to red, from red to a sickly green.

For an instant everything swam before his gaze. He had heard the words of the apparition repeated, “ He will return.” He grew giddy, and would have fallen had he not grasped a chair for support.

Recovering himself, he ordered Barton to be bound.

“ What ! ” cried the prisoner, “ art afraid of an old man ? Hast thou not enough men to guard thee ? Old Noll had best send thee half his arms.”

"Take him away," cried Carter : "I will hear no more. Let him be bound hand and foot, and a guard put upon his cell, where he is confined."

"Hold!" cried a voice, and Martin, pushing through the soldiers, stepped between Carter and the landlord.

"Who art thou?" exclaimed Carter.

"As honest a man as thyself," returned Martin. "This man has befriended me. For what crime is he to be taken to prison?"

"What right hast thou to ask that?" cried Carter.

"None!" cried Martin; "but the prisoner has. Where is thy warrant for his arrest?"

"None is required," said the Roundhead; "he has harboured malignant followers of the king. Of this I have evidence. Stand aside, or thou shalt share the same fate as the traitor."

Martin, hastily drawing his sword, lunged at the Roundhead's head.

There was a shock, Carter recoiled, and Martin's sword was shivered into a dozen pieces.

"Coward and villain!" cried Martin, struggling with the men who had rushed forward and seized him. "You wear armour. A curse upon the man who made it; but for such a crop-eared dog as thee it is needful; but the time is close at hand when neither armour nor thy hirelings shall avail thee."

Jabez Carter, white with passion and fear, turned without replying, strode from the room, accompanied by the guard, who dragged after them the two prisoners.

The village folk of Mossville were both astonished and alarmed to see Barton a prisoner.

They ran from their houses, and crowding round the guard, inquired what John had done; but the soldiers would answer nothing, and drove the people back with pikes.

"God save King Charles!" shouted Martin.

"Aye, aye!" responded a voice. "God send him a quick return. We have had enough of Puritan tyranny."

A cheer followed this, and several stones were thrown at the guard, who lost no time in conveying their prisoners to the lock-up.

Here John and Martin were taken to separate cells, and rushed in, bound as they were.

Martin recognized the cell to be the same as that which Hugh Walbrook escaped from, but strong bars had been added to the window, and he felt that there was little hope of escape from that quarter.

He lay ruminating on the fate of Hugh Walbrook, of what Harry Temple would think and say, when he heard the news of his arrest and the breaking up at the "Lord Protector," and whether he would quit Mossyville.

At last the balm for all wounds—sleep—came to his aid, and he fell into a light, pleasant slumber, dreaming of wandering in green fields with Marie Shelford.

Suddenly the dream changed ; he was in the dungeon again, gazing at a face that was peering at him through the window.

First it was Hugh's, then Temple's, and at last dwindled down to the sharp features of the boy Sprite.

He awoke with a start.

It was dark, but the moon threw a beam across the floor.

Something hid the beam for a second, and Martin, raising his eyes, beheld the well-known face of Sprite looking down upon him.

The window opened, and Sprite, inserting his comical face between the bars, ca'led Martin by name.

"Gadzooks!" he whispered, as Martin rose and approached the window. "How lucky they put thee here, good master!"

"Why lucky?" said Martin ; "there is no hope of success, and even you are running a risk for a useless purpose."

"Hark ye, master," returned the boy ; "what if I were to drop a knife between the bars?"

"My hands are bound," said Martin.

"Then I will release them," said Sprite, "if I can but squeeze my lean body through these bars."

In a twinkling Sprite was in the cell, and Martin's hands released.

"Now, master," said Sprite, "I go for help to file away the bars."

"Nay," returned Martin, as a thought flashed through his mind. "Sta, here; I may need thy assistance."

CHAPTER XII.

EXCHANGE NO ROBBERY.

WHEN Marie Shelford heard the news, her first impulse was naturally to go down to the prison, and, if possible, to see her lover.

The accounts she heard of Martin's arrest were various.

From one she heard that Martin had committed a theft at the Hall, from another that he had slain Jabez Carter, and that the body was now at the "Lord Protector," and a third stated that, not satisfied with the blood of his excellency, he had also run John Barton through the body.

Paying no heed to these reports, Marie hastened to the prison gates, where she found several of the guards assembled.

"Why, that's Shelford's pretty wench," said one as she approached. "How now, my pretty chick; what do you do here?"

"You have a prisoner here," she said, "one Martin Steynton, brought here this afternoon."

"Thou hast never spoken a truer word," said the man, "and, gadzooks! we mean to keep him. No man ever fitted himself with the halter better than he has done—the fool!"

"What has he done?" exclaimed Marie. "For the love of Heaven, tell me true."

"How, lass?" said the man. "How does it concern thee?"

"Ask no questions," cried Marie; "but tell me what he has done."

"Pshaw ! lass," returned the guard, "thou art surely mad. I tell thee that he has done that which will fit him with a halter. Is that not enough ?"

"Why speak in riddles ?" cried Marie, sinking on her knees. "I ask—nay, I implore—thee to tell me, why he is here."

"Well, then, since thou art so curious as to the coxcomb's fate," said the guard, "I will tell thee. He was such a fool as to try to let daylight through his excellency ; but his sword met with something harder than skin, and flew into pieces, and we dragged him here, with that old traitor, Barton, and as sure as the sun will rise again, there will be two necks stretched to-morrow."

"Can I see him ?" cried Marie.

"Nay," said the man. "Our orders are that no one is to be admitted."

* * * * *

We must now return to Martin and Sprite.

"It is a great risk, I know," Martin said ; "but if successful, freedom will surely follow. Keep the rope free, and ready for use."

"Never fear, master," returned Sprite, "I'll catch him fast enough."

"Hush !" said Martin, placing a hand over Sprite's mouth. "I hear footsteps. Are you ready ?"

Sprite nodded his head to imply that he was.

The footsteps became louder, a light gleamed under the door, the key turned, and one of the guard entered with some bread and water for the prisoners.

Without looking round the cell, he stooped to put the lamp on the floor of the cell, when Martin, springing forward, threw him heavily, and grasping the man's throat with one hand, gagged him with the other.

Meanwhile Sprite was not idle ; but, rushing to Martin's assistance, bound the guard's hands and feet.

Martin possessed himself of the pike which the guard carried, and motioned to the man that he required his cap, collarette, boots, and corslet.

These were removed by Sprite, Martin standing guard

over the soldier, pike in hand, should he attempt any resistance.

Martin then removed the outer articles of clothing, which were dragged from the soldier.

The Cavalier then donned the soldier's uniform, and pronounced himself ready.

Sprite climbed the wall, and was gone in an instant, and the Cavalier, slamming the door of the cell, strode slowly towards the gates.

The men were on guard, or gone to their homes, and Martin's progress was not arrested, even by the man who unlocked the gates and let him out.

What should he do ? Where should he go ? he asked himself, again and again.

Evidently it was not safe for him to stay at Mossville, yet he was loth to go ; he did not like to leave honest old John to his fate.

At any risk, he must see Temple, and, were death staring him in the face, Marie Shelford.

The morning was just dawning, and as yet the people had not risen ; but Martin knew well the labourers would soon be abroad, and, not wishing to encounter anybody who might recognize him, he quickened his pace towards the wood in which Hugh Walbrook had hidden.

But in this he was disappointed, for he had not gone far when he heard the sound of a horse at full gallop, coming in his direction.

It was not long before the horse and its rider appeared in sight, and Martin, to his joy, saw that it was his friend, Harry Temple.

"Hillo !" he cried, "where away so fast ? Gadzooks ! but thou ridest like a Cavalier. Come, Master Temple, draw in thy rein a little."

Temple would have passed him, but Martin, shouting in his own voice, caused Temple to pull up sharply.

"Heaven be thanked !" said Temple ; "how didst thou escape ? "

"I will tell thee anon," returned Martin ; "but to waste words now would be folly—I must reach Oxford before the hounds start."

"Oxford!" cried Temple; "I have just returned from there. When I heard of your arrest, I started at once to ask advice of Lord Cathrope."

"And what did he say?" inquired Martin.

"Very little, but gave me tidings that will make every Royalist mad with joy, and every Roundhead shake in his shoes. Listen, and let your ears drink the words—Noll Cromwell is dead!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Martin.

"All men must die," said Temple. "But let us not stay here; our little vault will afford you more accommodation and safety than the open road."

"I should be recognized were I to venture near the Hall," said Martin.

"Tush!" said Temple; "they are not such early birds as you think. By Heaven! we will steal a march upon them one of these days. But come, or we shall have the guard turning out. By my soul, Martin, you look every inch a Roundhead in that costume."

Temple descended from his horse, led it into some brushwood, and having secured it, rejoined his companion.

"I will return for the horse," he said, "when I have seen you safe, and heard the outline of your adventures."

"Which will not take two minutes to relate," returned Martin.

They reached the moat in safety, and, pulling aside the bushes which covered the entrance to the secret passages, they raised the trap-door, and were soon in their haunt.

Here they found Sprite busy piling rapiers and pistols.

Martin greeted him cordially, and having told his adventure to Temple, they sat down to a meal of bread, meat, and milk, which Sprite had managed to smuggle in some mysterious manner of his own.

"And so the news is true of the death of Cromwell?" said Martin.

"As that our sufferings are nearly at an end," returned Temple.

"What mean you?" rejoined Martin; "his son Richard will succeed him."

"A poor, weak-minded, harmless young fellow," Temple replied. "Before six months have passed Charles will be king of England."

"Heaven grant that it may be ! but I fear our troubles are not at an end," said Martin ; "but I do not despair, and look forward hopefully for better days. Hast heard news of Walbrook ?"

"Nothing," Temple replied, "beyond that he escaped by nothing less than a miracle, and has not been heard of since."

"Then he is safe," said Martin, cheerfully, "and long ere this with friends. What effect had the great news upon the people ?"

"It would have done your heart good to have seen them," said Temple. "Some wept for very joy, and all appeared glad. They shouted 'Long live King Charles !' till they were hoarse, and in vain did the soldiers endeavour to quiet them."

"This is indeed good news," said Martin ; "and something must be done to release Barton. Poor old fellow ! he is loyal to the bone, and would die cheerfully could he hear the news."

"The news of to-day will put another face on all matters," said Temple ; "and, if I mistake not, Jabez Carter and his crew will be a little more careful how they persecute and hang the despised loyalists. But now I must away, for I left my horse to cool himself. He brought me well, and, by my sword, he shall not repent it !"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROADSIDE INN.

THE inn at which Hugh Walbrook and Sir John Morton rested was a building very much resembling the unfortunate "Lord Protector."

It was conducted by a man of the strictest Roundhead principles.

He was standing at the door when the two fugitives came up, and greeted them in a twanging voice, and inquired their pleasure.

"Bring us a bottle of wine," said Sir John. "We are early travellers, and have broken our fast hours ago."

The landlord departed to execute the order, and Hugh and Sir John found their way into the parlour and waited patiently for the wine.

A footstep sounded in the passage, and a woman, evidently the wife of mine host, put her head in at the door, and, without saying a word, departed.

Next came a man of the ostler class, who, having scrutinized the stranger to his heart's content, went as silently as the hostess had done.

A few minutes elapsed, and then the landlord appeared, but without the wine.

Hugh began to feel uneasy. This Sir John observed, and nudged him to be of good heart.

"Prithee," said the landlord, "which road did you come?"

"From Uxcombe," said Sir John. "We should have been here last night, but, missing our way, were fain to content ourselves with a bed of grass, and the open sky for a blanket."

"Thou hast heard nothing of the escape of a malignant from Mossville?" returned the landlord. "The soldiers are in full chase, and—hark! If I mistake not, here they come."

The landlord quitted the room to see if such was the case, and left the Cavaliers to themselves.

"Gadzooks!" whispered Hugh, "we are undone."

"Courage!" said Sir John, "courage, and we will thwart them yet."

The tramp of the horses could now be heard plainly, and it was not long before they appeared at the inn.

"What news, friend Springall?" asked the officer in command. "Hast seen any strangers hereabout?"

"None to answer your description," returned the landlord. "I've had nobody in my house this morning, save a couple of tramps, and they are here now. Wouldst like to have a peep at them?"

"Nay," the officer replied; "time is precious. We will call and regale as we return; but, stay, I may as well see these fellows. These Cavaliers are up to such tricks that they would cheat the devil himself."

"Hush!" whispered the landlord; "use not profane words in my hearing. Remember the act."

"The act does not apply to soldiers," returned the officer; "but there, good master Springall, forgive me; I know it was wrong. Now let me see these men."

Hugh's heart beat high as he heard these words; but Sir John, with great presence of mind, took the box from his back, and throwing the wares upon the table, called upon Hugh to assist in arranging them, at the same time rating him severely about some supposed fault he had committed.

"Thou lazybones!" he roared, as the officer entered, "look thee here. Is it not enough that I feed, clothe, and pay thee in good coin of the Commonwealth, but thou must upset the box through your awkwardness? A pest upon thee, I say."

"Why these high words?" inquired the officer. "Tush! —if thy man did upset thy wares, it was an accident."

"Accident!" echoed Sir John. "Accident enough, I assure ye; he puts everything down to accident. He goes slouching about like a duck out of water, and last night he fell, and, spilling my goods in the road, spoilt more than I can cover with a rose noble. Accident! he'll have an accident one of these days that will put his neck in the halter, the lazy lozel."

Hugh put on a face of stupid contrition, and gazed from the officer to his supposed master in such a ridiculous, loutish style, that the officer was perfectly satisfied the man he wanted was not there, and, walking from the inn, he mounted his horse and gave the order to proceed.

Just then a mounted messenger dashed up to the door.

It was Harry Temple, and Hugh Walbrook had much to do to constrain himself, but he felt that the safety of many lives depended upon silence and discretion.

"Where have you come from?" demanded the officer; "thou hast been riding swiftly, for thy horse is covered with foam."

"I am messenger now to his excellency Jabez Carter," said Temple, "and am bearer of great news from Oxford. The Lord Protector is dead, and report says the king has received an invitation to return from a very influential body, who in former days supported the Lord Protector."

"Gadzooks!" cried the officer, "but this is great and terrible news. Dost hear, master Springall?"

"The malignants will once more rule the land," said the landlord, turning up his eyes until nothing but the whites were visible. "They will once more revel, and feast, and sing the songs of Satan. The Amalekites will smite the righteous. But go on, good soldiers, remember the malignant of whom you are in search; go on, capture him, but show him none of the mercies of the elect."

Harry Temple spurred on, and the soldiers departed.

"Old Noll dead!" said Hugh. "What think you of that?"

"That the devil has his own," returned Sir John; "but I will not be uncharitable. Peace to his ashes, and may they never be disturbed. But where's the wine to drink the king's health in? Hi! landlord, you have quite forgotten us."

The landlord entered, bearing a tray with a bottle and glasses on it.

The whites of his eyes were still visible, and he was muttering and calling down curses upon the Cavaliers.

"Wilt have a glass of thine own wine?" said Sir John. "Come, landlord, we must drown our grief."

The landlord declined the offer, and left the fugitives to themselves.

"We must not delay," said Sir John, as he filled the glasses. "If possible, we ~~must~~ reach Oxford before noon; an' I mistake not, we shall find the place in a state of excitement."

Finishing the wine, they started, Hugh Walbrook taking the box this time ; and, with their faces towards Oxford, set out with lighter hearts than either of them had carried for many a day.

CHAPTER XIV.

EFFECT OF THE PROTECTOR'S DEATH.

As may be expected, the news of the Protector's death created a great impression upon the people of Mossville and the inmates of the Hall.

Jabez Carter did not show himself that day, and was for several hours closeted with his steward, the end of which was an order to release John Barton. Just then a messenger arrived with the news of Martin's escape, but the order was not delayed, nor any search instigated for the escaped prisoner.

Barton's house had the previous night been filled with soldiers, who did not scruple at making themselves free with the choicest liquors, and the result was naturally that several, when called for in the morning, were found snoring quietly on the floors of the chambers, and not a few had made the cellar a resting-place.

However, little was done but to discuss the events that had followed one another, and the probable result of the death of so important a personage as Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector.

The day passed quietly at the Hall, and in the evening Jabez Carter, with a picked guard, rode out.

On their return, one of the men called his excellency's attention to a light burning in one of the unoccupied rooms of the Hall.

It was a peculiar kind of light ; misty, like that of a lamp shining through a fog.

Carter reined in his steed, and gazed fixedly at the light for a few seconds, and then turning to Goodall, said—

“ What make you of it, Goodall ? ”

"Gadzooks!" returned the steward, "I can scarcely say. The place seems beset with demons."

"The place shall be searched to-night," said Carter: "I cannot sleep in this uncertainty."

"Your excellency's commands shall be obeyed," Goodall replied.

As he spoke, the light expired, and the party, after waiting a few minutes to see if it reappeared, returned to the Hall.

When there, Goodall summoned the guard, and a thorough search was made; but, as before, they found nothing.

The room in which the light had been seen was a large, unfurnished apartment.

The dust lay thick on the floor; but there were no footprints to denote that anybody had been there.

The walls were of brick, covered with tapestry, which was rotting away, and behind which spiders and beetles held high revel.

The doors of other rooms were burst open and searched; but nothing to excite the least suspicion was found, and the searchers returned with a sickly sensation of fear upon them, and were glad when they were once more in the habitable part of the building.

That night Jabez Carter did not retire to rest, but sat up with the guard; and the men observed that he started at the slightest sound, and whispered to each other that he feared assassination.

The hours wore slowly away until the clock struck the hour of two.

As the bell ceased to vibrate, a trampling of feet was heard overhead, and the sound of voices conversing reached the watchers.

The men drew their swords, and looked towards Goodall for orders; but that brave soldier of the Commonwealth had closed his eyes, and was, to all appearances, fast asleep.

Not so with Jabez Carter; he sat grasping the edge of the table with his left hand, and a pistol ready in his right.

The tramping ceased, and for a few seconds all was still.

The men began to breathe more freely, but were startled by a hollow laugh, which seemed to come from under their feet.

Goodall awoke instantly, and instinctively drew his legs up to the edge of the chair.

The awful sound was repeated, and a voice cried—

“ Beware ! traitor and villain ! Thy master is no more ! ”

“ Mercy ! mercy ! ” cried Jabez Carter, sinking on his knees and covering his face with his hands. “ Torment me not thus, or I shall go mad.”

“ Vengeance, vengeance ! ” said the voice. “ The king shall return, and the heir of Mossville shall expel the usurper at the point of the sword. Listen ! ”

The men then heard the distant sound of a bell tolling a funeral knell.

A smothered cry of horror burst from their lips, and without waiting their commander's orders, they fled from the room.

* * * * *

Six months have passed away, and Richard, son of Cromwell, has retired in favour of the young king. All England is gay ; the bells in every steeple ring out the good news ; the hideous Puritan garb is cast aside, and once more the streets are brilliant with the extravagant dress of the Cavalier, and resound with the clanking of swords, jingling of spurs, merry laughter, and bright conversation.

See how brightly the sun shines upon the waving banners and gleaming arms ! Hark ! how the people shout with joy, as the trumpets pronounce the king crowned !

We must now take the reader back to Mossville.

John Barton's inn is thronged with merry customers, and the good old man's face beams with happiness and excitement.

A procession is winding its way down the street.

At its head, mounted on a magnificent charger, rides

Martin Steynton, followed by Hugh Walbrook, Harry Temple, and Sir John Morton.

The street is filled with armed men ; and it required but only a glance to show that they were prepared for action.

Martin reined in his steed, and turning to Hugh Walbrook, said—

“I have altered my mind. This night I will face the miscreant alone. Let the wood be surrounded so that neither he nor his villain Goodall escape.”

“Nay,” returned Hugh. “Why run such a risk ? Now that the rat is caged, why give him a chance of biting ?”

“It were better that I should meet him,” said Martin ; “I fear nothing.”

“As you will,” Hugh returned ; “but, marry, I will not trust thee out of ear-shot. When wilt thou go ?”

“To-night,” said Martin. “I cannot rest until I have met the scoundrel. But let us get on. Ha ! see, there is honest old John amongst his measures.”

The procession passed through the ancient street, amid the acclamations of the crowd.

“No more penalties for dancing round the fire !” cried one.

“Long live King Charles, and the heir of Mossville !” shouted another.

“God grant him a speedy return !” exclaimed a third.

There were no Roundheads about that day ; one or two had shown themselves in the morning, and barely escaped rough handling from the people.

Everything was changed. Instead of sour-looking countenances, every face wore a smile ; banners waved, trumpets sounded, and the bells from the village church made the very air rock with joy.

* * * * *

How stood matters at the Hall ?

Surrounded on all sides, hemmed in by several troops, Jabez Carter and his few retainers knew that resistance would be futile.

Several times had they offered to surrender, but each time

the reply was that Carter and his steward must be given up first.

As a drowning man clings to a straw, so did Carter cherish hopes of his escape, and prevailed upon his men to remain in the scantily-provisioned garrison.

On the night of the entry of Martin, his friends, and another detachment of the Royalist troops, Carter sat alone, watching from a small window the camp-fires in the adjoining wood.

His face was pale, careworn, and wrinkled, and showed plainly that he had suffered much.

"And this," he muttered, "is the reward for all. What a fool I was to accept the favours showered on me! Here am I, worse by far than a prisoner. If captured, certain death; and even should I escape, what hope have I?"

He rose to his feet, and pacing up and down the room, wrung his hands wildly.

"I see that upturned face," he cried, "see that form, and hear the voice foretelling my doom!"

"Thy doom is near!" cried a voice, apparently close to his ear.

Carter staggered back, and sinking into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, cried—

"Mercy! I am not fit to die."

There was a faint clicking sound, a soft footstep, and a hand was placed upon his shoulder.

Carter uncovered his face, and beheld Martin standing before him.

"What want you?" he inquired, endeavouring to shake off the sensation of fear. "What is your business?"

Martin sat down opposite the Roundhead, and then drawing his sword, said—

"Jabez Carter, I have waited for this meeting since the moment my father fell. I need no longer disguise the fact—I am Ingram Halliday."

Jabez Carter started to his feet, and was about to ring a bell, when the young Cavalier arrested his hand.

"Stay, sir," he said: "I am no assassin; I am alone, hence the reason for the drawing of my sword."

A momentary gleam of triumph lit up Carter's eyes.

"When I say alone," Ingram went on, "I would not have you understand that I am the only loyalist within these walls. One call with this," holding up a silver whistle, "would bring fifty men to my assistance. But I have sworn to meet you alone, and now I keep my word."

"If your visit is to claim the estate," said Carter, "I pray thee say no more; I am willing to surrender all on condition that I may be allowed to depart in peace."

"I have come to hold no parley with respect to the estate. I am here to avenge my father's death."

The Roundhead's face paled, and he grasped the arm of his chair convulsively.

"Your memory has not deserted you. Listen, and carry your thoughts back a year. Not content with causing the death of Sir Ingram, you set a price on my head. You have repeatedly spoken to your steward wishing for my death."

"How do you know this?" cried Carter, starting to his feet. "Has anybody played me false?"

"Patience, and I will tell you all," said Ingram. "When I heard of my father's death I was but a lad, but I swore to have revenge, and at the first opportunity started for Mossville. Many are the chances I have had to run my sword through your craven heart, but each time discretion came to my aid, and whispered that my hour of triumph would come."

The baffled Roundhead shivered from head to foot.

"And that hour is come," Ingram went on, his eyes gleaming. "I could have thee swung from the nearest tree, but such is not my purpose. But listen while I tell thee more. A boy called Sprite discovered a secret passage under the moat, and led me, in company with two or three other fugitives, to a vault under this very room. Here we found arms in abundance, a quantity of which were conveyed by night to Barton's, and buried in the garden; the remainder are now in the hands of armed men in the king's cause. The secret passages of which I spoke are filled with men, and await but my order to drive thy hirelings out, and fit thee with a halter."

Carter did not reply, but sat gazing at the Cavalier with a face expressive of terror and baffled rage.

"But I came here alone to meet you," said Ingram, drawing another rapier from under his cloak and placing it on the table—"to meet you hand to hand. Choose between the death of a gentleman and that of a churl."

Carter did not reply for a few seconds, but at last, clearing his throat, and speaking in a husky tone, he said—

"Sir Ingram, your father did not fall by my hand, nor have I any wish to stain my hands with your blood; I have said the estates are yours—take them, and let me go."

"And is this the courage of an Ironside?" sneered the Cavalier—"to rob, plunder, hunt, and scourge a man, and, when face to face, to lick the very dust from his feet, and cry for mercy? Pshaw! Come, I will give thee three minutes, and if thou art not decided then, my men shall have thee."

Carter rose, and taking the rapier from the table, and unsheathing it, looked at it from hilt to point, and after trying it, said—

"I accept your challenge: but answer me one thing. Should you fall, shall I go free?"

"I have left full instructions to that effect," returned the Cavalier, "and give you my word of honour such instructions will be carried out."

Carter did not reply, but placed himself in position, and the next instant both swords clashed together.

For near a minute neither of the combatants moved; they kept their eyes steadily upon each other's, the body well supported by the left leg, and both waited for the other to commence the attack.

Both men were skilled with their weapons, Carter having the advantage over Ingram in being somewhat taller.

Ingram was the first to lunge.

The point of his rapier caught in the sleeve of Carter's right arm, tearing it, and inflicting a slight wound in the shoulder.

Carter, smarting with pain, returned by thrusting furiously, but the blows fell harmlessly upon Ingram's rapier.

For some time neither seemed to have the advantage upon the other.

Carter's wound bled profusely, and Ingram had received a scratch on the neck.

Carter received another wound, and, losing his presence of mind, rushed forward, attempting to cut down his opponent's guard.

The next instant a shriek of agony rang through the apartment, and the Roundhead fell back upon the floor a corpse.

Ingram sounded the whistle.

The secret door flew open, and in less time than it takes to write it, the room was filled with armed men.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

A NUMBER of armed men are carousing in the servants' hall of the mansion at Mossville.

They speak in no twanging tone of voice, nor do they turn up their eyes until only the whites are visible.

The walls ring with the sound of laughter which only wine and good fare can provoke, and a bluff voice is singing a song of the days of King Charles the First to a ring of admirers.

"Gadzooks!" cried one, "we have forgotten one toast. We've drunk to the king, to Sir Ingram and his friends—but we forgot Sprite."

The toast was drunk with acclamation, and Sprite was seized by four lusty fellows, and borne round the spacious apartment in triumph.

When the noise of shouting and laughter had subsided a

little, the horns were again filled with wine, and the men sat down to converse.

"What thinkest thou," said one, "will be the fate of our prisoner?"

"I know not," returned the man addressed; "but I think a short shrift and a sudden ending. Remember it was Goodall who led the party against Sir Ingram's father; but we shall see in the morning."

"How does he fare?" asked the first.

"But badly," returned the other; "he has done nothing but howl and groan for mercy since he was locked up."

The next morning the people of Mossville were aroused with the braying of trumpets and the rolling of drums, and, looking out, beheld a party of soldiers, with worthy Goodall in their midst, proceeding towards the Hall.

Another party of soldiers awaited them at the gates.

The trumpets were sounded again, and Goodall was led into an open glade.

Here he found Sir Ingram, Hugh Walbrook, and Harry Temple.

"Prisoner," said Sir Ingram, sternly, "what have you to say that you should not be hanged as a traitor?"

Goodall did not reply, but cast an imploring look at his questioner.

"I have no wish to shed blood," said Sir Ingram, "and therefore spare your life; but beware of coming nearer than twenty miles of Mossville, or your life shall be forfeited."

Goodall promised to obey, and, thanking Sir Ingram for his mercy, left the group and left Mossville for ever.

"And now," said Sir Ingram, "we will return to the Hall, since the place is now thoroughly purged of such vermin. By my soul, this great triumph of the king atones for all his sufferings!"

"Let him beware how he uses his triumph," said Temple; "he is gay and extravagant."

"Cease croaking," said Sir Ingram, smiling. "What is a king for but to use and circulate the money? Tush, lad! Look around you and see what an economical government has done for the country."

THE FUGITIVE CAVALIER.

* * * * *

Another year has flown by on the wings of time. The bells of the ancient church are sending forth a boisterous peal, deep toned and rich, as if they were ringing for no ordinary occurrence.

The street is full of people in holiday attire ; the women and children gaily decked out in ribbons.

They loiter in the street, and turn their eyes towards the road leading to the Hall.

A bright, handsome boy, in the attire of a page, comes slowly along mounted on a pony. The people greet him joyfully, as their old favourite, Sprite.

John Barton once again rears the sign of the "Crown and Sceptre," and a noisy crowd of rustics cluster round the porch, and drink the health of Sir Ingram in bumpers of nut-brown ale.

"So now he's coming to live with us altogether," said one. "God bless him ! we'll make him welcome."

"Old Shelford ought to think himself a lucky man."

"Nay," exclaimed John, joining the crowd, "Marie is lucky to find so good and noble a husband."

The sun shines brightly, and turns the bubbling stream into a thread of silver ; the birds sing in the trees, and the bells clash joyously.

Sprite rides up and down the street asking and answering questions, telling anecdotes of his year of London life.

The clock strikes ten, and Sir Ingram and Marie Shelford, soon to be Lady Halliday, ride slowly down the road towards the church.

How the people crowd round and cheer him ! His right hand is grasped by a hundred faithful followers.

Hugh Walbrook and Harry Temple are there, and come in for their share of cheering and hand-shaking, and by the time the church is reached they are all well-nigh tired.

Listen ! how the rich notes of the bells mingle with the music of the birds, and how the sun floods the landscape with golden light !

Hark at the voices of the good people of Mossville ! See

how caps are flung in the air, and the happy bride covered with flowers !

The church is reached, and the bells cease. The service is performed, and the happy pair depart.

In Mossville Park there are whole bullocks roasting, and a score of cooks are hard at work in the Hall.

Wine ! It flows like a river, and many a rustic will go home mellow, to be soundly rated the next morning by his better-half. But what of that ! Sir Ingram has returned from London. Let us drink and be merry !

The feasting and drinking is over, and the lads and lasses dance merrily to the notes of a couple of fiddles ; the old people, under the shade of giant oaks, watching them with eager eyes.

Then Sir Ingram comes out and walks among his people, listens to their delighted expressions on the change of times, and the cheering is renewed again and again when he calls them to toast Charles, King of England !

THE END.

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